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IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

JUNE, 1953

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THE STAR LORD

By Boyd Ellanby

Introducing the

AUTHOR

★
Boyd Ellanby
★



THE above unposed photo shows us (husband and wife team) working out a tough plot! We were both born in Missouri, and attended town and country schools in the great unfenced Middle West. Later we went on to various institutions of higher learning, including the universities of Kansas, Harvard, Oklahoma, Boston, and the School of Oriental Studies in Cairo, Egypt, picking

up a few degrees on the way. We majored in English literature and organic chemistry, and studied the usual polite languages plus Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Urdu, and Bengali.

Our hobbies have included playing clarinet in a symphony orchestra, magic, painting (furniture as well as pictures), mycology, skiing, collecting objects d'art, cooking

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IMAGINATION

*Stories
of Science
and Fantasy*

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Front cover by Malcolm Smith, illustrating THE STAR LORD. Interiors by Smith, Tillatson, McCauley, and Terry. Cartoons by Vogel, Ludway, Kohler, and Naaman. Astronomical photo, back cover, courtesy Yerkes Observatory. Printed in USA by Stephens Printing Corp., Sandusky, Ohio.

The Σ ditorial

D ID you ever take time to figure out just why you read science fiction? It's an interesting question, and the answers, depending on the individuals, can be pretty diverse. We don't know how you'll answer the question, but if you give it a little thought you may surprise yourself.

W E did just that. The question came up the other night when Rog Phillips dropped in for a sociable gab fest. We got to talking about science fiction and Rog asked us why we read it. We answered quite simply—and quickly—because we liked it. That seemed to be a reasonable answer, and fairly conclusive. But since that time we've been bothered with the thought that our answer really didn't say a thing.

S URE we edit a science fiction magazine. Before that we wrote and sold the stuff. Before that we read it—and before that we were learning our ABC's so we *could* read it. A logical pattern of development toward eventually earning a livelihood? Perhaps, but certainly not the whole story. We have dabbled in mystery, detective, adventure, western and a few other fields both as a writer and editor—but we always returned to science fiction. Why? Because only in science fiction were we happy.

But again the question, *why?*

W E found the answer (after lo these many years) through a process of reduction. Some people read science fiction for kicks, to amuse themselves for awhile with "fantastic" goings-on; we don't. Sure, we like to be entertained as well as the next man, but there's something more, a deeper motive—a craving that can only be satisfied by stf. Some people can read science fiction or let it alone with no strong leanings either way; we can't let it alone. Again, it's that mysterious something that acts like a magnet against which we're powerless to resist. Some people read science fiction because they want to be educated—or feel they are being educated; not us. We're not anxious to get a short order course in cybernetics, nuclear fission, rocketry, or various and sundry other subjects that are incorporated into stf; nor do we take particular interest in becoming an expert on social trends of the future. No, we don't read science fiction for its educational value; it's more on the entertainment side for us. (Still no answer for the *why?*) Again, there are people who read science fiction because they think it's the fad of the decade; it's no fad to us after more than seventeen years of active interest. Too, there are some people who read science fiction for

pure escapism—to get away from the humdrumness of everyday living, people who achieve a vicarious uplift by being transported via the printed word into an alien (i.e., not in conformity with our norm scientifically or sociologically) existence; not us, we take our entertainment seriously . . .

AFTER reducing all the above reasons to a big round zero we sat back and thought in some detail. Here's what we came up with. When we look at the night sky ablaze with a myriad stars we start asking ourself questions: *What star is that? How far away is it? Are there planets revolving around it? Is there life—perhaps man on any of its planets? If so, is some man looking up at his sky and seeing our star and wondering the same thing? How many galaxies can we see with the naked eye — hundreds of thousands of light years away? What lies beyond them—beyond the eye of the most powerful telescope on Earth? More galaxies? How far does it all go?—There are stars up there whose light is just reaching us, stars that died millions of years before their light reached Earth. We look at the Moon and we wonder what it would be like to step foot on its surface — and Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, et al in our own solar system. We think of time machines and the ability future man may have to visit his future as well as our primitive past. We wonder what our Earth will be like a million years from now—we'd like to see it with the aid of one of those time machines of the future. We'd like to take a*

grand tour of the Universe — in a ship that travels so fast it makes light seem a crawl. (Will that be the answer to hyperspace—beyond the speed of light?) Questions. Always questions we can't answer. But they're questions to which *possible* answers are supplied in science fiction. We can follow *fictional* people and the adventures they have among the stars; we can travel with them through time—past and far future—and still for a moment that burning desire from within to be doing it ourself.

THAT'S why we read science fiction. Not an unusual reason, and certainly not new. Our desires are simply a thousand years ahead of our time! Why do *you* read science fiction? Let us know . . .

WHAT'S new with Madge? One thing—we're a monthly effective with this issue. See you May 28th! wlh



"See, Ebenezer, I told you they'd rescue us!"

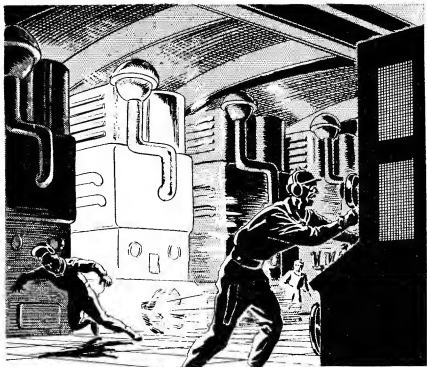


THE STAR LORD

By

Boyd Ellanby

To some passengers a maiden voyage was a pleasure cruise; to others it meant a hope for new life. Only the Captain knew of its danger!



THE *Star Lord* waited, poised for her maiden voyage. The gigantic silvery spindle, still cradled in its scaffoldings, towered upwards against the artificial sky of Satellite Y.

The passengers were beginning to come on board before Captain Josiah Evans had finished checking the reports of his responsible officers. The ship was ready for space, now, and there was nothing more he could do until takeoff.

With long, deliberate steps he walked to his cabin, closed the door, and in the privacy he had come to regard as the greatest luxury life had to offer him, he sank into his chair and reached for the post-bag which had been delivered by the morning's rocket ferry from earth.

There were no personal letters for him. He rarely received any and never really expected any, for his career had always been more important to him than personal

ties. Shoving aside the official documents, he picked up the small brown parcel, slit the plicofilm covering with his pocket knife, and inspected the red leather cover with its simple title: *Ley's Rockets and Space Ships*. At the bottom of the cover was a date: May 1, 2421, Volume 456. In the nearly five hundred years since the publication of Volume one, which listed all the earth's rocket ships on half of one page, the annual edition of this book, regularly edited and brought up to date, had become the space-man's bible.

Captain Evans was annoyed to find that his hands were shaking as he leafed through the pages, and he paused a few seconds, trying to control his excitement. His black hair had begun to turn gray above his ears, and there were a few white hairs in his bushy eyebrows. But a healthy pink glowed under the skin of his well-fleshed cheeks, and the jut of his chin showed the confidence of one used to receiving immediate, unquestioning obedience. When his long fingers had stopped their trembling, he found the entry he had been looking for, and a triumphant smile lighted his heavy features as he settled deeper in his chair and read the first paragraph.

"Star Lord: newest model in space-ships of the famed Star Line. Vital Statistics: Construction be-

gun February 2418, on Satellite Y. Christened, October, 2420. Maiden voyage to Almazin III scheduled spring, 2421."

He looked up at the diagram of the ship which hung on the wall at his right, then glanced at the zodiometer on his desk. May 3, late spring.

"Powered by twenty-four total conversion Piles. Passenger capacity 1250. Crew and maintenance 250. Six life boats, capacity 1500. Captain. Josiah Evans."

His throat swelling, he was almost choked with pride as he read the final Statistic. This, he thought was the climax of his career, the place he had been working towards all his life. It had been a long road from his lonely boyhood in a Kansas orphanage, to Captain of the earth's finest spaceship.

The *Star Lord* was the perfection of modern space craft, the creation of the earth's most skilled designers and builders, the largest ship ever launched. Protected by every safety device the ingenuity of man had been able to contrive, she was a palace to glide among the stars.

His heart beat more rapidly as he read the next section.

"Prediction: her maiden voyage will break all previous speed records, and regain for her backers the coveted Blue Ribbon, lost ten years ago to the Light Lines."

No question of that, he thought. No faster ship had ever been built. But he frowned as he read the final paragraph:

"Sidelights: Reviving a long obsolete custom, certain astrologers in London have cast the horoscope of the Star Lord and pronounced the auguries to be unfavorable. This verdict, plus the incident at the christening, has caused some head-shaking among the superstitious fringe, and some twittering about 'cosmic arrogance'. But few of the lords of the earth, we imagine, will therefore feel impelled to cancel their passages on this veritable Lord of the Stars."

EVANS remembered that christening. High in the scaffolding he had stood on the platform with the christening party: the Secretary of Interstellar Commerce, the Ambassador from Almazin III, the Governor of Satellite Y, and President and Mrs. Laurier of Earth.

Swaying gently in the still air, the traditional bottle of champagne hung before them, suspended at the end of a long ribbon. Mrs. Laurier's eyes were shining, her cheeks flushed, as she looked at her husband for a signal. At his smile and nod she had said in a high clear voice, "I christen thee *Star Lord!*" and then reached out to grasp the bottle. Before she could touch it, somewhere above them

the slender ribbon broke.

The bottle fell like a stone, plummeted straight down and crashed into a million fragments on the floor of the satellite.

An instant's shocked silence, and then a roar of voices surged up from the crowds watching below. Mrs. Laurier had put her hand to her mouth, and shivered.

"What a dreadful thing!" she whispered. "Does that mean bad luck?"

President Laurier had frowned at her, but the Secretary of Interstellar Commerce had laughed.

"Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Laurier. There is no such thing as luck. Even without a bath of champagne, this magnificent vessel will prove that man is certainly master of the universe. She begins her life well and truly named."

The Star Line ought to abandon that silly custom of christening a new ship, thought Captain Evans. It was an archaic ceremony, utterly irrational, a foolish relic of a primitive world in which people had been so uncertain of their machines that they had had to depend on luck, and to beg good fortune of unpredictable gods.

Taking up *Ley's Space Ships* again, he began fondly to reread the page, when there was a knock at the door and a crewman entered.

"Mr. Jaspersen to see you, sir."

The Captain stared, a tiny mus-

cle in his cheek quivering.

"You know I'm not to be disturbed until after takeoff, Stacey."

"Yes, sir. But Mr. Jasperson insisted. He says he knows those rules don't apply to *him*."

Evans closed the book, laid it on his desk, and stood up. He leaned forward and spoke softly.

"Tell Mr. Jasperson—"

"Tell him what, Josiah?" boomed a voice from the opening door. "You can tell me yourself now."

Burl Jasperson was a portly little man with legs too short for his bulging body, and clothes that were too tight. His head was bald except for a fringe above the ears, and he might have been a comical figure but for the icy blue eyes that probed from under the dome of his forehead.

"What have you got to tell me? You're quite right not to let the ragtag and bobtail bother you at a time like this, but I know your old friend Burl Jasperson is always welcome."

With scarcely a pause, the Captain extended his hand.

"How are you, Burl? Won't you come in? I hope the Purser has taken care of you properly?"

"I'm comfortable enough, thanks, and I'm looking forward to the trip. It's odd, come to think of it, that though I've been Chairman of the board of directors, and have spent some thirty years managing

a fleet of space liners, yet I've never before made a trip myself. I don't like crowds of people, for one thing, and then I've been busy."

"What made you decide to go along on this one?"

REACHING across the table, Jasperson picked up the silver carafe and poured himself a glass of water.

"Ah! Nothing like a drink of cold water! The fact is, I wanted to check up on things, make notes of possible improvements in the Star Line's service, and sample passenger reactions. Then too, I'll have the satisfaction of being present on the trip which will establish the Line's supremacy, once and for all. This crossing will make history. It means everything to us, Josiah. You know we're counting on you to break the record. We want to win back the Blue Ribbon, and we expect you to manage it for us."

"I shall do my best."

"That's the spirit I like to see. Full speed ahead!"

"Certainly—consistent with safety."

"Consistent with *reasonable* safety, of course. I know you won't let yourself be taken in by all this nonsense about the imaginary dangers of hyperspace."

"What do you mean?"

"All this nonsense about the

Thakura Ripples! But then, of course you're a sensible man or we wouldn't have hired you, and I'm sure you agree with me that the *Star Lord* can deal with anything that hyperspace has to offer."

Jasperson adjusted the set of his jacket over his plump stomach while he waited for an answer, and Captain Evans stared at him.

"Is that why you're wearing a pistol?" he said dryly. "To help the ship fight her battles?"

"This?" His face reddened as he patted his bulging pockets. "Oh, it's just a habit. I don't like being without protection; I always wear a gun in one pocket and my recorder in the other."

"You'll scarcely be in any danger on the ship, Burl. Better leave it in your cabin."

"All right. But about the Ripples — you aren't going to take them seriously, are you?"

"I wish you'd be a little more frank, Mr. Chairman. Has the Star Line suddenly lost confidence in me?"

"No, no, nothing of the sort! We've every confidence in you, of course. But I've been hearing rumors, hints that we may have to make a slow crossing, and I've been wondering. But then, I'm sure that a man of your intelligence doesn't take the Ripples any more seriously than I do."

"I don't know what gossip you have been hearing," said the Captain, hesitantly. "'Ripples' is probably a very inaccurate and inadequate name for the phenomenon. Thakura might equally well have called them rapids, falls, bumps, spaces, holes, or discontinuities."

"Then why did he choose to call them Ripples?"

"Probably because he didn't know exactly what they are. The whole problem is a very complicated one."

"Complicated nonsense, I call it. Well, we won't quarrel, my dear Josiah, but don't let them hold us back. Remember, we're out to break all records!"

UNDER the artificial sky, crowds of people streamed into the administration building of Satellite Y. The jumping-off place for all rockets and ships going to and from the stars, Y-port was a world of its own, dedicated to only one purpose, the launching and berthing of ships.

It was a quiet and orderly place as a rule, and its small permanent colony of workmen and officials lived a spartan existence except for their yearly vacations on Earth. But today it seemed as if half the earth's people, friends and relatives of the passengers, had chosen to make the port a holiday spot of

their own, to help celebrate the launching of the *Star Lord* on her maiden voyage. The rocket ferry between Y-port and Earth had had to triple its number of runs in the past week, and this morning's rocket had brought in the last of the passengers for Almazin III.

Alan Chase trudged wearily along with the crowd entering the building, trying to close his ears to the hundreds of chattering voices. He was tall and very thin, and his white skin clothed his bones like brittle paper. Walking was an effort, and he tried to move with an even step so he would not have to gasp for breath as he moved slowly forward with the line before the Customs desk. In his weakness, the gaiety around him seemed artificial, and the noise of voices was unendurable.

Just ahead of him in line was a young man in an obviously new suit; the pretty girl holding to his arm still had a few grains of rice shining in her hair.

"That will be all," said the Inspector. "I hope you and Mrs. Hall have a very happy honeymoon. Next!"

He gritted his teeth to stop his trembling as the Inspector reached for the passport, glanced at a notation, then looked up.

"I'll have to ask you to step in and see Dr. Willoughby, our ship's doctor. It will only take a mo-

ment, Dr. Chase."

"But I'm not infectious!"

"But there seems to be some question of fitness. In cases like yours the Star Line likes to have a final check, just to make sure you'll be able to stand the trip. We're responsible, after all. Last door on my right."

Close to exhaustion, Alan walked down the hall to the last door and stepped inside. A healthy, rugged man with prominent black eyes looked at him with a speculative glance.

"And what can I do for you?"

Holding out his passport, Alan sank down into a chair, glad of a chance to rest, while Dr. Willoughby studied the document, then looked up, the routine smile wiped off his face.

"Well! So you're Dr. Alan Chase. I've been much interested in the papers you've been publishing recently. But this is bad news, Dr. Chase. I suppose you had an independent check on the diagnosis?"

"Not even one of our freshmen could have missed it, but I had it confirmed by Simmons and von Kramm."

"Then there's no question. How did you pick it up, doctor? Neosarcoma is still rather a rare disease, and it's not supposed to be very infectious."

Alan tried to speak casually,

although just looking at the rugged good health of the man opposite him made him feel weaker.

"No, it's not very infectious. But after medical school, I went into research instead of practice, and I worked on neosarcoma for nearly five years, trying to devise a competitive chemical antagonist. Then, as used to happen so often in the old days, I finally picked it up myself—a lab infection."

THE older man nodded. "Well, you're doing the right thing now in going to Almazin III. I've made some study of the disease myself, as you may know, and I entirely agree with your theory that it is caused by a virus, and kept active by radiation. Since the atomic wars, the increased radioactivity of the earth undoubtedly stimulates mitosis of the malignant cells. It feeds the disease, and kills the man. But on a planet like Almazin III where the radiation index is close to zero, the mitosis of the sarcoma cells stops abruptly, virus or no virus."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Alan. "I've read some of your papers on the subject, and the evidence sounds pretty convincing."

"It's conclusive. If you arrive in time you've nothing to worry about. I've seen men as badly off as you, with malignant growths well advanced, who migrated to

Almazin III and recovered within a year. Without radioactivity to maintain it, the disease seems to be arrested immediately, and if the tissue damage has not gone too far, the tumor regresses and eventually disappears. Once you're cured, you can come back to earth and take up your work where you left off. Well, let's check you over."

The examination was brief. Dr. Willoughby initialed the passport, and offered his hand.

"You should stand the trip all right. But I'm glad you didn't put it off any longer than you did. Another two months of earth's emanations, and I'm afraid I couldn't have certified you. It's lucky for you that the *Star Lord* is the fastest ship in space. That's all, Dr. Chase. I'll be seeing you on board."

In the swiftly moving elevator cage Alan ascended the slender pylon to the boarding platform, crowded by a group of quarreling children in charge of an indifferent nursemaid.

The Chief Steward, rustling in starched whites, stepped forward at the port, clicked his heels, and curved his thin lips into a smile.

"How do you do, sir. The Star Line wishes you a happy voyage. Will you be kind enough to choose?"

Following his nod, Alan looked down at the silver tray extended for his inspection, and then step-

ped back as a heavy perfume assaulted his nostrils.

"What are those?"

"Carnations, sir, for the gentlemen's coats, and rose corsages for the ladies' gowns. Compliments of the Star Line."

"But they're white!"

"Yes, sir. The white flowers, the only kind we are able to grow in Y-port, are symbols of the white light of the stars, we like to think."

"What idiot gave the Star Line that idea?" said Dr. Chase. "You know stars are all colors—white, green, yellow, blue, and even red. But white carnations are a symbol of death."

Steward Davis lowered his tray. "Then you don't care to wear one, sir?"

"Not until I have to," said Alan. "Now please call some one to show me my cabin."

"Band playing in the lounge, sir. Tea is being served in the Moon Room, and the Bar is open until just before takeoff."

"Thanks, but I've been ill. I just want to find my cabin."

"Boy!" called Steward Davis. "Show this gentleman to 31Q."

ALAN followed the pageboy through a complex of corridors, ascending spirals of stairs, down a hall, and to the door of Cabin 31Q. The boy threw open the door and Alan stepped in, then

halted in shocked disbelief at sight of a white-haired old man who was just lifting a shirt from an opened suitcase.

"I am Dr. Chase. Isn't this Cabin 31Q?"

The old man beamed, his pink skin breaking into a thousand tiny wrinkles. "That's right. 31Q it is."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Have you no powers of observation? Unpacking, of course. I was assigned to this cabin."

Staggering over to a bunk, Alan sagged back against the wall. He lifted his tired eyelids and stared at the sprightly old gentleman.

"But I was promised a cabin by myself!"

The old man looked distressed. "I'm very sorry, young man. I, too, hoped to have a cabin to myself. I learned only a few minutes ago that I was to be quartered with another passenger—evidently you. Somebody made a mistake, there's no question of that, but the Purser tells me that every bit of space is occupied, and no other arrangements can be made. Unless you want to postpone your voyage, and follow in a later ship?"

"No," said Alan. His voice had sunk to a whisper. "No, I can't do that."

"Then we'll have to make the best of it, young man," he said, picking up a pile of handkerchiefs,

and putting them in the drawer he had pulled out from the wall.

"Let me introduce myself. I am Wilson Larrabee—teacher, or student, according to the point of view. Some years of my life I've spent being a professor of this or that at various universities, and the other years I've spent in travel. Whenever the bank account gets low, I offer my knowledge to the nearest university, and stay there until I pile up enough credits so I can travel again."

"Sounds a lonely sort of life, with no roots anywhere."

"Oh, no! My wife loved traveling as much as I do, and wherever she was, was home." He paused, his hand arrested in the act of hanging up his last necktie, and for a moment his face was somber. Then he finished hanging up the tie, gave it a little pat, and continued cheerfully.

"We saw most of the world, in the fifty years we had together. The last trip she made with me, to the Moon and back, was in some ways the pleasantest of all. After we returned, we started planning and saving and dreaming of making one last grand tour outside the solar system. And then—well, she was more than seventy, and I try to think that she isn't dead, that she just started the last tour a little ahead of me. That's why I'm making this jaunt now, the one we

planned on the *Star Lord*. It's lonely, in a way, but she wouldn't have wanted me to give up and stay home, just because I had to go on alone."

GLANCING at Alan's bent head, Professor Larrabee abruptly banged shut the lid of his empty suitcase and shoved it into the conveyor port in the wall to shoot it down to Luggage. Then he straightened up and ruffled his white hair.

"That's done, young man. Will you join me in the Bar for a space-cap?"

"Sorry, sir. I'm very tired. I just want to rest and be quiet."

"But a frothed whiskey would help you to relax. Come along, and let me buy you a final drink before we take off for eternity."

Alan noticed with distaste the white carnation in the coat lapel of his companion. "I hardly like to think of this trip as being synonymous with eternity," he said. "You sound as though you didn't expect to come back."

"Do I? Perhaps I made an unfortunate choice of words. But do you believe in premonitions, Dr. Chase?"

"No. All premonitions stem from indigestion."

"No doubt you are right. But from the moment of boarding this ship I have been haunted by the

memory of an extremely vivid story I once read."

"What kind of a story?"

"Oh, it was a scientific romance, one of those impossible flights of fancy they used to publish in my boyhood, about the marvels of future science. This was in the days before we had got outside the solar system, but I still remember the tale, for it was about a spaceship which was wrecked on its first voyage."

"But there've been hundreds of other such stories! Why should this particular one be bothering you now?"

"Well, you see," said the professor apologetically, "it's because of the name. The coincidence of names. This other ship, the one in the story—it was called the *Star Lord*."

"I wouldn't let that worry me. Surely it's a logical name for a spaceship?"

Professor Larrabee laughed. "Logical, and perhaps a trifle presumptuous. But I'm sure it's a meaningless coincidence, my boy. Now how about that drink?"

Alan shook his head.

"Come, Dr. Chase. Allow me the liberties of an old man. You're obviously ill, you want to crawl into a hole and pull the hole in after you, and enjoy the deadly luxury of feeling sorry for yourself. But we can't do that sort of thing. Let

me prescribe for you."

With an effort, Alan smiled. "All right, Professor. I usually do the prescribing myself, but right now I'm too tired to argue. I'll accept a spacecap with pleasure." He swallowed a panadol tablet to ease his pain, then pulled himself up.

"That's the spirit, my boy! We will drink to the *Star Lord*, that she may have a happier fate than her namesake."

FIVE minutes before takeoff. The first signal had sounded. The Bar was closed by now, the lounges deserted, and in theory the twelve hundred and fifty passengers were secure in their cabins, waiting for the instantaneous jump into hyperspace.

At the port, Chief Steward Davis leaned against the wall with his tray of wilting flowers, while the Second Officer and two crewmen stood by, waiting for the final signal to close the port.

They were startled by a sudden commotion, a flurry of voices, and turned to see the elevator doors open on the loading platform. A group of laughing people surged forward.

"But I'm late again, darlings!" cried a vibrant voice. "You must let me go now! The ship is waiting just for me, I know. Stop holding me!"

"But we don't want to lose you!" called a man.

"You know I'll be back in the fall."

"But the theater can't get along without you!"

"But it won't be forever, darling!"

Still laughing, Tanya Taganova pulled away from her teasing friends. She was a tall woman, very slender; very beautiful, with her burnished auburn hair and warm brown eyes. She walked forward with the swift precision of a dancer, in her flared gown of stiff green satin, whose ruff stood out about her slender neck to frame a regal head. In her arms she carried an enormous sheaf of red roses.

With light steps she entered the port, then turned to wave at her friends and give them a last challenging smile.

The Second Officer asked sharply, "Are you a passenger, madame? You're rather late."

"And I tried *so* hard to be on time for once in my life! I'm very sorry, lieutenant!"

"Quite all right, madame. You got here in time, and that's what counts. But you'll have to hurry to get to your cabin before take-off."

"Wait!" said Steward Davis. His long face had come to life as he looked at her admiringly and extended his tray of flowers.

"White roses? For me?" she said.

"Yes, madame. Compliments of the Star Line."

Turning her head, she moved away. "Thank you, but I'm not ready to wear white roses, yet. It's not that they're not lovely, but—" she raised her arms, burdened with their scented blooms, "you see that I already have so many flowers, and the red rose is still for the living!"

Davis banged his tray to the floor and shoved it aside with his foot.

"All right, madame. Now we'll have to hurry. We'll have to run!"

A FINAL bell rang, a final light flashed.

On the floor below the ship, the crowds of relatives and wistful stay-at-homes gazed up at the beautiful metal creation, poised on its slender fins, nose pointed towards the opened dome.

A vibration began, a gentle, barely perceptible shuddering of the ground which increased in frequency. It beat through the floor, into their feet, until their whole bodies quivered with the racing pulse that grew faster, faster, as the twenty-four total conversion Piles in the ship released their power. Then, as the people watched, between one instant and the next, the ship van-

ished. In the blink of an eyelid she had shifted to hyperspace.

The *Star Lord* had begun her maiden voyage.

* * *

By the second day out, most of the passengers felt completely at home. The ship had become a separate world, and the routines they had left behind them on earth, and the various routines they would take up again some six weeks from now on Almazin III seemed equally remote and improbable. Life on the *Star Lord* was the only reality.

She moved through the uncharted realms of hyperspace, travelling in one hour's time as measured by earth watches, more than twenty light years distance, if measured in the units of real space. The ship itself was quiet. The vibration of the takeoff had ended in a moment, and now the passengers could hear no noise and hum of motors, could feel no motion against swelling waves, no battering against a barrier of uneven air. The artificial gravity induced a sense of security as absolute as though the ship were resting on living rock.

Although most of the cabins were small, they were cleverly designed to provide the maximum of comfort, even the least expensive of them. For the very wealthy, the rulers of the galaxy's finance, the owners of the galaxy's industries,

the makers of the galaxy's entertainment, there were the luxury cabins. The floors glowed with the soft reds of oriental rugs, the lounge chairs were upholstered in fabrics gleaming with gold thread. Cream-colored satin curtains fluttered in an artificial breeze at the simulated windows, and on the walls hung tranquil landscapes in dull gold frames. To those who had engaged them, the ornate cabins seemed only appropriate to their own eminent positions in life.

Delicious meals were served three times a day in the several dining rooms, the softly lighted Bar was never closed, and every day three theaters offered a varied program of stereo-dramas. There was even — the most marvelous, daring, expensive luxury of all — a swimming pool. The pool was small, and was open only to the first cabin passengers, but the fact that a ship travelling to a distant solar system could afford room enough for a pool, and extra weight for the water needed to fill it, seemed evidence that man had achieved a complete conquest of the inconveniences of space travel.

One luxury, however, freely accessible to even the poorest sheep herder on earth, was denied the passengers of the *Star Lord*.

They could not see the stars. They could not see the sky.

The ship had portholes, of

course, and observation rooms which could be opened if at any time she cruised in normal space, but the ports and observation windows were closed now, for there was nothing to see. The ship was surrounded by blackness, the impenetrable, unknowable blackness of hyperspace, but this black emptiness did not frighten the passengers because they never bothered to think about it.

But the builders of the ship had designed it so that even the simple pleasure of looking at a friendly sky should not be denied its passengers. An artificial day and night of the appropriate length was maintained by the dimming and brightening of lights, and the main lounges were bounded with special walls which looked like windows, through which could be glimpsed bright summer days, fleecy clouds drifting over a blue sky, and, in the evenings, soft starlight.

EVERY passenger should have been soothed into contentment by these devices, but by the end of the first week, Burl Jasperson was restless.

He hated to sit still, and the hours and the days seemed endless. His bald head and portly body were a familiar sight as he roamed the ship, inspecting every detail as though it were his personal respon-

sibility. Once a day he called on Captain Evans to check on the progress of the *Star Lord*, once a day he chafed under the cold courtesy of the Captain's manner, and then wandered on. In his jacket he wore his pocket recorder, and he was momentarily cheered whenever he found an excuse for making a memorandum:

"Chairs in lounge should be two centimeters lower. Sell Deutonium shares. How about monogrammed linens for the first cabins? Install gymnasium?"

As he walked, he murmured these thoughts to his recorder, and each night his meek and colorless secretary sat up late to transcribe them into the locked notebook which was his special charge. After Jasperson had taken his sleeping pills and crawled into bed.

On the evening of the eighth night out, Burl Jasperson wandered into the Bar, and drummed his pudgy fingers on the table as he waited to give his order.

"A glass of ice water, and a Moon Fizz. And be sure you make it with genuine absinthe. You fellows seem to think you can get away with making it with *'arak*, and your customers won't know the difference. Well, just remember I'm one customer that does, and I want *real* absinthe."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Jasperson," said the Bar steward.

Turning restlessly in his chair, Burl let his eyes stop on the white-haired old gentleman beside him, happily consuming a brandy and soda. After a moment's inspection, he stuck out his hand confidently.

"My name's Jasperson. Everything all right? Enjoying the trip?"

The pink skin wrinkled in amusement.

"I am Wilson Larrabee. Everything's fine, thank you, except that the ship is almost too luxurious for a man of my background. A professor's salary does not often permit him indulgences of this kind."

"You a professor? Of what?"

"Various things at various times. Philosophy, physics, Elizabethan drama, history of science—"

"Myself, I never could understand why a sensible man would go into that business. No money. No prestige. Never doing anything, just reading and thinking."

"Every man to his taste," said Larrabee.

"Yes, within limits. But the things some of you professors think up! Most of the ideas do more harm than good, scaring people to death, hurting business. You'd think they ought to have more sense of responsibility!"

He tasted his drink, then nodded knowingly at the bartender. "This is something like! *Real* absinthe."

Professor Larrabee studied his

companion. "I can hardly suppose, Mr. Jasperson, that you hold professors responsible for all the ills of the world. And yet you seem disturbed. Did you have something in particular in mind?"

"Yes. The Thakura Ripples!"

AMUSEMENT vanished from the professor's eyes. "What about them?"

"Why are people so afraid of them? As far as I can see, they're just a piece of nonsense thought up by a dreamy-eyed physics professor, and he hypnotized people into believing in them. But as I was telling Captain Evans last night, they've never been seen, never been measured, and there's nothing at all to prove that they have any existence outside the mind of a madman. And yet people are afraid of them!"

"And just what are the Thakura Ripples?" said Alan Chase, drawing up a chair. "Waiter, I'll have a spacecap."

"Feeling a little better tonight, Alan?" asked his friend.

"Some, thanks. I just had a checkup from Dr. Willoughby, and he thinks I'm more than holding my own. Now go on about the Ripples. Where are they? What do they do?"

"Suit yourself," Jasperson muttered. "If you want to tell ghost stories, go ahead."

"Thank you. The Thakura Rip-

ples, my boy, are an unexplained phenomenon of hyperspace. We do not know what they are—only that they are dangerous.”

“But I thought that space was entirely uniform?”

“Alas, no. Not even normal space can be called uniform. It has been known for a long time that variations exist in the density of the interstellar gases. Just why they occur, what pattern they follow, if any, was for many years one of the major unsolved problems confronting astronomers and physicists. Then they learned that these variations in density of the interstellar gases were directly connected with the development of the successive ice ages on the earth, and eventually a study of the collisions and interactions of the various light forces from the stars in the galaxy made the pattern clear. We know, now, that the variations occur only in a certain band of space. They may occur at any given place within that band, but their position is constantly shifting and unpredictable.”

“Now you see it, now you don’t?” said Alan.

“Exactly. Now it was Thakura’s theory that the Ripples are an analogous band of mysterious forces existing in hyperspace. They may be tangible barriers, they may be force barriers, we do not know. But a ship entering this lane *may*

go through it without damage, and by pure chance take a course which misses all these bumps in space. Or, by going slowly and using his instruments to feel his way, a navigator can often sense them ahead, and if he is skillful he may be able to dodge them. But if, in some terrible moment, he smashes head-on against the Thakura Ripples, the conversion Piles which power his ship are immediately affected. They begin to heat, perhaps to heat irreversibly, and if they get out of control, they may vaporize. In the last fifty years at least five ships have vanished in this region, and it was Thakura’s belief that they were disintegrated on the Ripples.”

“But there isn’t any evidence!” Jasperson exploded.

“Isn’t a demolished space ship evidence?”

“No! It’s evidence that something went wrong, certainly, but it doesn’t tell us *what* went wrong. I’m not an unreasonable man, professor, I’m a hardheaded business man, and I like to deal with facts.”

“I don’t have an intimate knowledge of these matters, of course,” said Larrabee, “but it was my impression that in the past fifty years since travel in hyperspace became common, several ships have been unaccountably lost.”

“Your first figure was right. Five ships have been lost—that much is fact. Why they were lost is

still a question. It's my considered opinion that they were lost by human failure; the crewmen let the Piles get hot, and the ships were helpless. In the early days they had to get along with only one or two Piles, and if they went wrong the ship was done for. But we've changed all that. That's why the *Star Lord* has twenty-four Piles. No matter what happens it's impossible that *all* of them should go bad at once. She can ditch the dangerous Piles and still always have power enough left to make port. One thing is certain, this ship will never be wrecked on the Ripples of a mad scientist's imagination! A phenomenon like the Ripples, is impossible. If it existed, we'd have had some proof of it many years ago."

"But surely you don't mean to imply that if we don't know a fact, it is therefore impossible?"

"Not at all. But you know yourself, Professor Larrabee—you're an educated man—that by this time our physicists understand the universe completely, from A to Z. There are no unexplained phenomena. Thakura is shut up in a madhouse now. In my opinion, he was already insane when he published his theory."

Larrabee was nodding, thoughtfully. "I wonder what makes you so certain of your theory?"

"What theory? I never deal in

theories. I'm talking fact."

"Your theory that we have unveiled all the mystery of the universe; how do you know? Every now and then, of course, man lives through a century of such amazing progress that he concludes that nothing remains to be learned. But how can he ever be certain?"

"But we are certain! Most physicists are in agreement now that there hasn't been one single unexplained physical aberration in the past century!"

"Most physicists except Thakura, you mean?"

"But Thakura is insane! We understand all the physical phenomena of the universe."

"Except the Thakura Ripples?"

Jasperson slammed down his glass and stood up, his face red and puffy. "Steward! More ice water! I'm getting tired of those words, professor. Do you think for one minute I'd have risked my life to come on this trip if I'd thought there was the slightest danger?"

Alan looked up languidly. "You mean you wouldn't mind sending a crew and passengers into danger—as long as you could take care to be safe yourself?"

"Surely you're not afraid, Mr. Jasperson?" said Larrabee.

"No. What is there to be afraid of?" He gulped down his drink. "Nothing can wreck the *Star Lord*!"

WHEN Dr. Alan Chase woke up next morning and glanced at his wrist watch, he realized that the breakfast hour was nearly over. Professor Larrabee had already left the cabin.

Alan was not hungry. It had been many months since he had really enjoyed an appetite for food, but he got up and began to dress, so that he could perform the duty of eating. But his clothes, he noticed, were beginning to fit a little more snugly. He fastened his belt at a new and previously unused notch, buttoned his jacket, and then performed the ritual he carried out every morning and every evening.

Touching a facet in the ornamentation of his wrist watch, he walked about, geigering the room. Radiation normal, somewhat less than earth's normal, in fact. The twenty-four Piles were well shielded, and if this continued, he should survive the journey in fair shape.

At the door of the dining room he paused, for the entrance was blocked by Steward Davis and the young couple he had noticed the day they left Y-port.

The tall young man with rumpled black hair was arguing, while the pretty girl clung to his arm and watched his face admiringly, as though he were the only man in the world.

"But Steward," said the young man, "Dorothy and I — that is,

Mrs. Hall and I—we felt sure we'd be able to have a table by ourselves. We don't want to be unreasonable, it's only that this is our honeymoon, maybe the only time we'll ever get to spend together, really, and we like to eat alone, together, I mean. That's the reason we chose the *Star Lord*, because the advertisements all talked about how big and roomy it was, and how it didn't have to be so miserly with its space as they did in earlier ships. They said you could have privacy, and not have to crowd all together in one stuffy little cabin, the way they used to."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hall," said the Steward crisply. "We are all proud of the spaciousness of our ship, but not even the *Star Lord* can provide separate tables for everybody who—Oh, good morning, Mr. Jasperson! Glad to see you, sir." Turning his back on Tom, he smiled and bowed to the new arrival "Everything all right, sir?"

"Good morning, Dr. Chase. No nightmares last night? 'Morning Davis. Tell that waiter of mine to be more particular about giving me plenty of ice water. I like plenty of water, and I like it cold."

"Sorry, sir. I'll speak to him at once." He bowed again as Jasperson strode on.

"Then could we—" Tom began.

Davis whirled with an impatient frown. "What? Are you still

here? Surely I made it clear that there's nothing I can do, Mr. Hall?"

"But couldn't you at least move us to another table?"

"I regret that you are dissatisfied with our arrangements. All table space was allocated before we took off from Y-port."

"But you've put us with such noisy people!" said Tom stubbornly. "They keep talking about how much money they made in deutonium, and they refer to us, right in front of us, as the babes in the woods. They may be rich, but they haven't the manners of a six-year old. We *can't* stay at that table."

"Mr. Hall, I can't waste any more time with you. If all our passengers were to demand special privileges—" He shrugged his shoulders.

DOROTHY Hall whispered shyly, "Ask him, then, what about that man?" and she nodded her head slightly to the right.

"Yes," said Tom. "You say there isn't enough room, but what about that table over there? It's made to seat two, and there's just that one man who eats alone."

Davis glanced over. "Oh, yes. But that's Mr. Jasperson! He likes to be by himself."

"Who's Mr. Jasperson?"

"A very important man."

"And I'm not?"

Alan broke in. "Excuse me, Mr. Hall. I am Dr. Chase. Won't you join my table? Three of the people assigned places there are Almazanians, a diplomatic mission, I think, and they naturally prefer to have their own cuisine in their own cabins, so we have room for three more."

"How about it, Steward," said Tom. "Any objections?"

Shrugging his shoulders, Davis strolled away.

Tom glared at the retreating back. "That guy has the face of a murderer. He can't be decent to anybody with less than a million credits."

Dorothy laughed. "Never mind, Tom. Someday you'll be the most famous lawyer in the Interstellar courts, and maybe you'll get a chance to prosecute him for arson or treason."

Alan led them to the rear of the dining room, where his two table companions were finishing the last sips of their coffee, and lighting the first cigarette of the morning.

"Miss Taganova, may I present Tom and Dorothy Hall, who would like to share our table."

Tanya lifted her beautiful auburn head and smiled a welcome. Professor Larrabee stood up, his pink cheeks crinkling with pleasure as he shook hands with Tom.

"Young people make the best companions," he said, "especially on long journeys."

Alan sat down and reached for the vitamin dispenser. "These particular young people want privacy. They're on their honeymoon, and would hardly shed a tear if all the rest of the world suddenly ceased to exist."

"It's not quite like that, Dr. Chase," said Tom, his face reddening, "but those people at our other table were just out of our class, one way or another. The men talked all the time about their bank accounts, and the women clawed at each other about which one had the biggest house, and the biggest pearls and diamonds and emeralds, until we began to feel smothered in a blanket of credits and diamonds."

"Credits and diamonds must be very nice things to have," said Tanya. "I've never managed to collect many of either."

"I've nothing against them in themselves," said Tom, "but right now they don't seem to matter very much. We had to wait five long years to be married, five years for me to finish my law training, and for Dorothy to wear out her family's opposition. They didn't want her to throw herself away on a penniless lawyer."

"As if I were a child who didn't know her own mind," said Dorothy. "Well, I wanted Tom, pen-

niless or not; and anyway, in a few years he's going to be the finest lawyer in the Interstellar Courts."

"I hope you'll always be as happy as you are now, children." The professor's eyes were misty as he stood up. "Come, Miss Tanya. Take a stroll with me, and bring back to an old man a brief illusion of youth."

"But you'll never be old!" she said affectionately. "You're still the most fascinating man on the ship."

Like every other man in the room, Alan watched with envious eyes as Tanya took the professor's arm and sauntered to the door, the heavy taffeta skirts of her pearl-gray gown swishing and rustling as she walked.

WITHIN the sealed hulk of the *Star Lord* the twenty-four Piles silently did their work, out of sight, out of the thoughts of the passengers. Driving the ship through the unknowable infinities of hyperspace, they held her quiet, steady, seemingly without motion. They behaved as they were intended to, their temperatures remained docilely within the normal limits of safety, and the ship sped on.

The technicians and maintenance men, the navigators, the nucleonics men, all kept aloof from the social eddies frothing at the center of the

ship. They lived in another world, a world of leashed power, in which the trivial pursuits of the passengers were as irrelevant as the twitterings of birds.

In the central tiers occupied by the passengers, each morning the walls of the lounges and dining rooms resumed their daily routine of simulating the panorama of earth's day. Lights glowed into a clear sunrise, brightened into a sunny sky across which light clouds scudded.

Children played in the nurseries, grownups idled through the hours, eating the delicious food, taking a dip in the priceless pool, attending the stereodrams, and playing games. At the cocktail hour, the orchestra played jaunty tunes, old-fashioned polkas, waltzes, mazurkas; at dinner, it shifted to slower, muted melodies, suitable background for high feminine voices, deep male laughter, and the heavy drone of talk.

In the walls, the sun set, twilight crept in, and the stars came out. After the stars had been advancing for several hours, people finished their dancing and card games, walked out of the theaters, had a final drink at the Bar, paused at the bulletin board which detailed the ship's daily progress, and went to bed.

Dr. Alan Chase followed his own routine. Each morning and each

evening he goigered his cabin and found the radiation still below the earth normal. He was surprised to find that he was holding his own, physically, instead of becoming progressively weaker, as he had expected, and he began to feel hopeful that he might quickly regain his health on the inert atmosphere of Almazin III. He was not strong enough, however, to take part in the active games of the passengers, and had not enough energy to try to make friends, except for the people at his dining table—particularly Tanya.

Of all the lovely women on board, he thought Tanya Taganova the loveliest. He knew he was not alone in this, for the arresting planes of her face, the dramatic color of her rustling taffeta gowns, attracted many followers. He would sit in the lounge at night and watch her dancing, and then realize, suddenly, that she had disappeared, long before the evening was over. She was an elusive creature, as unpredictable as a butterfly.

Wandering listlessly about the ship, one afternoon he stepped through the open door of the Library. In the almost empty room he saw the auburn head of Tanya, bent over so as to hide her face and show him only her glowing hair. She raised her head as he approached.

"Are you looking for a book, Dr.

Chase?"

"No, I just wondered what was interesting you so much."

SHE shifted her seat, to let him see a large sheet of rough drawing paper covered with a chalk sketch of a desolate gray marsh over which green waves swirled from the sea, behind them loomed rose-colored granite hills.

"I'm a scene designer, you know. But at home, somehow, I never have time to myself. People will never believe I'm serious, and when I want to get some real work done, I run away on a trip, by myself. Right now I'm sketching out a set for a new stereodrama we're staging next autumn. This particular one is for a melancholy suicide on Venus. I've several more here." She pointed to a scattered heap of drawings.

The soft chime of the library telephone interrupted them. Tanya rose and moved to the desk.

"Yes? Not now, youngster. I'm working. Yes, maybe tomorrow."

Alan had been examining her drawings. "Is this what you do during the hours when you disappear?"

"Usually. Sometimes I drop in to the playroom to chat with the children. They're more interesting than their parents, for the most part, and nobody ever seems to pay much attention to them."

"But do you have to work at night, too? When you disappear in the middle of the evening, everybody misses you. The men all watch for you to come back, their wives sigh with relief, and old man Jasperson toddles around and searches the dance floor and bleats, 'Where's Miss Tanya? She was here just a little while ago, and now I can't find her anywhere!'"

"I know. But one dance an evening with him is about all I can stand. I don't really like the man."

"But why? He's a little stupid, but he seems a harmless sort of duck. In a financial deal, of course, I can see that he'd be sharp and ruthless—that's how men like him become millionaires — but he can't knife anybody on shipboard."

Tanya slashed a heavy black line across her drawing, bearing down so hard that she broke the chalk, and threw the pieces to the floor.

"He's a coward! Haven't you ever noticed the way he bullies the waiters? How he patronizes Professor Larrabee, and ignores the young Halls? And to hear him tell it, you'd think only his advice makes it possible for Captain Evans to run the ship! I'm afraid of men like that. They're cowardly and boastful, and in a crisis they are dangerous!"

"What an outburst over a fat

little bald-headed man! Aren't you letting your dramatic sense run away with you?"

Laughing, Tanya picked up her chalk and resumed sketching. "Probably, but after all, I earn my living with my imagination."

"Then you aren't just a rich young woman dabbling in the theater?"

"No indeed. If you could see my bank account! No, I'm going to Almazin III to make authentic sketches of the landscape. We may do a show set in that locale, next year."

"I wish I could see some of the shows you stage."

"When we get home, I'll send you a pass."

He did not answer. Suddenly the melancholy Venusian scene she was creating depressed him, as if it had been a reflection of his own barren life.

"Or don't you like the theater, Dr. Chase?"

"It's not that," he said hastily. "Only—" He shrugged his shoulders. "Something about this ship, I suppose. Home seems so very far away."

"Have you felt that too? I've had the feeling, sometimes, that earth isn't there any more, and that this ship is the only reality."

BY the end of the third week out, Burl Jasperson was afflicted

by an almost intolerable tension. He prowled the ship like a tiger, for he could think of nothing more to do. For the moment there were no more improvements to suggest to the Star Line, no more brilliant financial deals to execute, and each empty minute seemed to swell into an endless hour. He tried to relax by viewing the dramas on the stereoscreen, but he was always too uneasy to sit through an entire performance, and would leave in the middle to resume his pacing of the corridors.

At his private table in the dining room he stared at the empty chair across from him, munching his food mechanically, seething with unrest. He could see Tanya's gleaming head across the room, with Alan Chase's beside her, and he tortured himself with imagining the light laughter, the friendly talk which must be taking place there. Never, before this trip, had he been made to feel so unnecessary, so much an outsider. Wasn't he a lord of finance, a master of industry, the kind of a man to be respected and admired? Of course, less successful men called him ruthless, he realized, but he was not ruthless—only realistic. He was an able man, and if he expected people in general to take orders from him, it was only because he was more intelligent and more capable than the people to whom he gave his

orders. Nothing wrong with that.

But these miserable empty days were beginning to frighten him. He felt lost. The ship ran by herself, without needing his help, and there was no doubt at all that she would win the Blue Ribbon. Although he questioned Captain Evans sharply, and checked every day on the minutest data of the voyage, so far he had found nothing to criticize—except the coldness of Josiah Evans' manner.

He ground his teeth through a stalk of celery in a vicious bite. After all, wasn't he Chairman of the board of directors of the Star Line? Wasn't it his right, even his duty, to make sure that everything was going well?

The crowd of diners had grown thin, now, and he could see clearly the little group at Tanya's table. They were laughing, and he could see the delightful animation which always disappeared whenever he tried to talk to her.

Steward Davis sidled up, a deferential smile on his long face.

"Is everything all right, Mr. Jasperson?"

"Um."

"Looks like we'll get the Blue Ribbon this trip, doesn't it, sir?"

"Um."

"If you should ever want any special dishes, sir, any little delicacies not available to everyone, I should be glad to speak to the

chef."

Jasperson pushed his plate away. "I'll remember, Davis." Throwing down his napkin he stood up. His waiter came running.

"Dessert, sir?"

WITHOUT answering, he strode across the room, trying to compose his mouth into a smile as he reached his goal.

"Miss Taganova, would you care to join me in the bar for a drink?"

They all looked up at him in astonishment.

"But I've just finished dinner," she said.

He waited, uncertainly. At last Professor Larrabee pointed to the unoccupied chair.

"Perhaps you'd care to join us, instead?"

No one else spoke, and he sat down nervously. Conversation had stopped, and at last he broke out with explosive force.

"I wish Captain Evans would speed up this ship. It feels as if we'd been on the way forever. And still three weeks to go!"

"Do you find three weeks so long a time?" asked the professor.

"It seems like eternity. I wish something would happen. Why can't we have a little excitement?"

"Couldn't you find any more banks to break today?" Alan drawled. "No gambles on the stock exchange?"

The professor broke in soothingly. "Now, there's an idea! You're obviously a gambling man, a man of action. Do you play poker? Why don't you get up a little game among your friends? That ought to provide you with excitement for one evening at least."

"Would you join the game?"

"No, no, my dear Mr. Jasperson! You and I do not move in the same circles. I confess, I enjoy the delightful uncertainties of poker, but I could never afford to play for your stakes."

"Then we'll make the stakes what you can afford. Each raise limited to five credits?"

"In that case, I might consider it."

"You, Dr. Chase?"

"Too exciting for an invalid, I'm afraid."

"You, Mr. Hall?"

Tom squeezed Dorothy's hand under the table. "No, thank you, Mr. Jasperson. My wife and I, we have other plans."

"If it's money, young fellow, I'll stake you, and you can have a year to pay me back."

Tom grinned. "You're very generous. But what makes you so sure you'd be the winner?"

"I always win. Will you join the game, Miss Taganova?"

He accepted her silent headshake without protest.

"Then I'll try to round up two

or three others. We don't want a big crowd—too many people make me nervous. Perhaps Willoughby will play, and I'll get Captain Evans. He doesn't like the game, but he'll sit in if I insist. See you in my suite in half an hour."

THE poker game had been in progress for more than an hour when Captain Evans entered the parlor. Frowning, Jasperson looked up.

"You're late, Josiah. I told you we'd begin at nine."

"Sorry, Burl. I was delayed."

Jasperson paused in the act of raking in the pot, and looked up sharply.

"Anything wrong?"

"No, all serene."

"Anything you need my advice on?"

"No, just a routine conference with the navigator."

"Then pull up a chair and get in the game."

Nearly half the chips were piled in front of Jasperson, and across from him a modest heap sat before the professor. At his right the baggy-eyed only son of a deuterium millionaire fingered his dwindling pile indifferently, and on his left Dr. Willoughby stared unbelievingly at his few remaining chips, three blues and a couple of whites.

"I'll just watch," said the Captain. "You know I'm not much of

a gambler. Chess is my game."

"Oh, come on, Josiah. I insist that you play. Prove that you've got red blood in your veins."

Evans hesitated, but remained standing. "I'd rather just look on."

"Now look here, Captain. Doesn't the Star Line always try to please its passengers? Well, I'm a passenger. Or is it just your native caution that makes you afraid of losing?" His laugh did not entirely disguise the irritation in his voice.

"All right, anything to oblige," said Evans wearily, pulling up a chair. "What stakes are you playing for?"

The Captain lost, slowly and steadily. Mechanically he went through the motions of dealing, discarding, drawing, and betting, but it was obvious that his mind was not on the game. Jasperson rarely lost a hand, if he had stayed at all, while Professor Larrabee's luck was unpredictable, the pile of chips before him fluctuating, growing or diminishing with startling swiftness.

They were interrupted once when a waiter came in with a tray of bottles and glasses. The Captain refused.

"But one drink won't do you any harm," said Jasperson.

"I never drink in space. For one thing, the rules of the Star

Line explicitly forbid it, as you should know."

"Yes, I helped make that rule. That means I can release you from it."

But Evans was firm. "I never drink in space," he repeated. "I'll take two cards—no, make it three."

The professor surveyed his hand with his customary sprightly air.

"I'll play these," he said.

Jasperson discarded. "I'll take one."

Captain Evans languidly opened the betting, but after the first round he dropped out, and only Jasperson and the professor remained. Each raised the other persistently, and while Jasperson grew more and more excited, the professor smiled as usual, his eyes glinting with amusement.

"And another five," said Larrabee.

For the first time, Jasperson hesitated. "You sure you mean it, professor? I kind of hate to clean you out, especially because I doubt if you can afford it."

"Suppose you let me be the judge of what is, after all, a private matter?"

"All right, it's you that will go bankrupt, not me. And another five."

"See you, and raise you five!"

JASPERSON sat back and pondered, his cold eyes calculating.

"Now let's review the situation, just among friends. The professor's a smart man, and he isn't rich. He saw me draw one card, so he can make a pretty good guess what I probably hold, if I drew the right card, but he's playing a pat hand, and playing as if he meant it. Well, I've put a lot of credits in that pot, but I never did believe in throwing good money after bad, even in a friendly game. I quit."

"What? You mean you're going to drop out without even seeing me?"

"I know when I'm licked. Five credits is five credits, even to me." He threw down his cards and reached to gather in the deck.

Slowly Professor Larrabee raked in the chips, as Jasperson went on complacently.

"That's the only principle a practical man can work on. Know when you're licked. Get all the facts, analyze all the data, and then act on the logical conclusion, no matter how much you may hate to. It was clear to me that you must have drawn a pat flush that would top my straight, so I simply decided not to waste any more money."

"Thank you, Mr. Jasperson. I appreciate the gift."

"It was no gift. You had me beat."

"Did I? Only if you had all the

facts, only if you analyzed all the data, and only if you reached the correct conclusion. Perhaps you ought to see what I held."

Deliberately he turned over his hand and spread the cards.

Jasperson jumped to his feet in a rage. "But that's a handful of junk! Not even a pair! You held a bust, and I had you beat!"

"Certainly. But you didn't know it. Without all the facts, you acted on a faulty conclusion."

Breathing noisily, his plump face flushed, Jasperson smashed his fist into his pile of chips and scattered them to the floor.

"A pure bluff! I hate bluffing!"

"Then you miss a great deal of fun in life," said Larrabee calmly. "I find it dull just to analyze data and then bet on a sure thing. I like a little excitement."

Slowly the financier sank back into his chair. He gulped in a large breath of air and tried to steady himself, a sickly smile around his mouth.

"Excuse me, Professor. But you took me by surprise." Hands trembling, he began to shuffle the deck.

There was a knock at the door, and a crewman entered.

"What is it, Stacey?" said Captain Evans.

"Chief Wyman is waiting to see you in your quarters, sir."

With a sigh of relief, the Cap-

tain turned in his few chips. "Time for me to quit, anyway."

His face still red, Jasperson looked up hopefully. "Shall I come with you? Any way I can be of use?"

"No thank you, Burl. I'll leave you to your little game."

IN the Captain's quarters, Chief Wyman was pacing the floor.

"Sir!" he burst out. "This is it! We've hit the Thakura Ripples!"

"Impossible, Wyman! It's too soon. What's happened?"

"You told me to report as soon as we ran across anything suspicious, sir. Well, look what our screen has been picking up."

He handed over a plastic record tape, perforated by minute notches which outlined an unsystematic, jagged line of peaks and hollows.

"We've been getting this stuff all evening."

"Doesn't seem to mean anything. It doesn't show any sort of pattern."

"No, sir, and it may not mean anything, but it's different from what we've been getting up till now. And then another thing. It's probably not serious, but the number ten Pile has started to beat."

"Begun to heat? What's wrong with Pile Ten? One of your men been getting careless?"

"I'm positive not, sir. I have complete confidence in all of

them."

Captain Evans studied the record tape, a worried frown on his forehead.

"It's just possible, I suppose, that the Ripples—Is Pile Ten heating fast?"

"No, sir. It's still below the critical level, and of course we're putting in dampers."

"I wish we *knew* something definite about the Thakura Ripples," the Captain burst out, "what they are, what they do, what they look like, and *how* they affect our atomic Piles! If only Thakura were still a sane man, and could finish up his calculations!"

"Maybe Thakura was crazy to start with," said Chief Wyman, "or maybe the Ripples drove him crazy. I don't know. But I do know Pile Ten is heating."

"Well, keep watching it. Double the checks on the other Piles, and let me know of even the slightest rise."

As soon as the door had closed, Evans opened the desk panel and buzzed Operations.

"Pilot Thayer? Captain Evans here. I am about to give you an order. As soon as you have executed it, come at once to my cabin, and bring Navigator Smith with you. Here it comes. Reduce speed immediately, repeat immediately, to one-half, repeat one-half. That's all."

NOBODY felt the alteration in the progress of the *Star Lord*. Within the metal casing of the ship nothing was changed. The sunny scenes in the walls were just as bright, and the synthetic light of the slowly moving stars at night was just as soothing. For the passengers, the black menace outside the ship did not exist. Because change of speed cannot be felt in hyperspace, they had no way of realizing that the *Star Lord* had slackened her pace and was feeling her way cautiously as a blind man to avoid the ominous barriers of the Thakura Ripples.

On their way to their cabins that night, there were a few people who noticed that the bulletin which detailed the day's run had not been posted on the board, but they wondered only for a moment why it had been omitted, and then forgot the matter.

Going in to breakfast next morning, Burl Jasperson stopped to read the bulletin as usual, to find how many light years distance had been put behind him in this interminable journey, and he clenched his fist at finding a blank board before him.

Abruptly turning his back on the dining room, he proceeded straight to the Captain's quarters, where Stacey stopped him in the anteroom.

"Where's Captain Evans?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Jasperson. The

Captain left orders he was not to be disturbed."

"He'll see *me*. Let him know I'm here."

"I'm sorry, sir. My orders were, nobody was to be admitted. He was very specific."

Stacey did not budge, but the inner door swung open and the Captain's tired face peered out.

"You have a very penetrating voice, Burl. I suppose you might as well come in. It's all right, Stacey. Stand by."

He moved to let Jasperson enter, and closed the door.

About the desk sat Chief Engineer Wyman, Chief Pilot Thayer, and Chief Navigator Smith, all studying a chart laid out before them, and making computations. They looked up at the interruption.

"What's going on here?" said Jasperson. "If you're having a conference of some kind, I should be in 'on it."

"Just routine work, Burl. What is it you want?"

"Somebody is getting careless. The bulletin of yesterday's run has not been posted. It's little things like that that make all the difference in the reputation of a ship-ping line. Somebody ought to be reprimanded. What was the day's run, by the way? Well, speak up, Josiah! I'm waiting."

Evans reached for a sheet of

paper from the desk and silently handed it across. Jasperson looked at the figures, frowned, and spoke angrily.

"Have your computers broken down, Captain Evans? Or is this a joke? Why, that's only about two-thirds our usual distance. At this rate it will take us from now to eternity to arrive."

"You'd better sit down, Burl." The Captain looked steadily at him. "Those figures explain why I ordered that the bulletin was not to be posted. Not one passenger out of a hundred would have noticed much change in the figures, but I do not want to alarm even that one in a hundred. I have ordered the ship to proceed at half-speed."

"What? Have you lost your mind?"

"We are approaching the Thakura Ripples. It just isn't safe to go any faster."

Expelling a long breath, Jasperson spoke more calmly.

"That means we'll be late in reaching Almazin III?"

"Three or four days, perhaps, not more. Eventually we'll get through this danger zone, and then we can resume speed."

"But we *can't* be late, Captain Evans! Surely you haven't forgotten that we're out after the Blue Ribbon? The Light Line's ships have made it in forty-three days,

and we've got to do it in forty-two or less. This trip is a matter of prime importance to the Star Line, and a delay of even three days would keep us from breaking the record. I thought you understood all that?"

SIGHING, the Captain shook his head. "I know all that. But we are in dangerous regions, and I can't risk my ship just for a piece of silk! Last night Pile Ten started heating. It's still hot, and we may have to expel it. I hadn't expected to reach the Ripples so soon, and had even hoped we could avoid them entirely, but evidently the limits of the band haven't been charted very accurately. The only safe thing is to go slow."

"But the Ripples are imaginary! Why do you think we've hit them?"

"There's the number Ten Pile."

"But why should only that one out of the twenty-four be affected? And even if it is heating, that's no good reason for slackening speed."

Captain Evans glared back at the plump little man, then his eyes wavered, and his fingers fiddled uncertainly with the papers on his desk. His chief officers were watching him intently. At last he straightened his shoulders and spoke sternly.

"Mr. Jasperson. Surely it will not be necessary to remind you

that I am the Captain of this ship. I am in sole command. Is that correct?"

"Yes, but—"

"Would you seriously advise me to go contrary to my own knowledge, my own instinct? To run this ship into an area of danger, to risk the lives of the passengers, all for a piece of ribbon? Would you want to take the responsibility of giving me such an order, even if I should agree?"

As Jasperson looked around at the watchful faces of the Engineer, the Pilot, and the Navigator, some of the belligerence left his voice.

"Certainly not, Josiah! And anyway, it's not your knowledge I'm quarreling with. If you run the ship according to the facts, you'll do all right. It's when you let your judgment be influenced by your imagination that I object. But by all means, do as you think best. When the Star Line loses confidence in its Captains, they replace them. I'll look in again, if I may, later in the day."

When the door had closed behind him, Pilot Thayer shook his head wonderingly. "You'd think he ruled the universe!"

"He's a man of very limited imagination," said the Captain. "But never forget, he wields a great deal of power. Now, are your orders clear? Smith, you'll continue your charting."

"I'm doing my best, Captain, but what am I charting? Sometimes I wonder if maybe your friend Jasperson isn't right. If the Ripples are imaginary, maybe I'm getting gray hairs trying to make a map of something that isn't there!"

"Chart it anyway! We can't take chances. Wyman, I'm not a bit satisfied with the way Pile Ten is behaving. It should have cooled to normal before now. Watch it. If we have to dump it, we want to act before it gets too hot. Anything else?"

"One other thing, sir," said Engineer Wyman, pointing to the diagram of the ship which hung on the wall. "Pile Ten is located just below Lifeboat C, and the radiation index of Boat C is getting a little high."

"That's bad. Well, keep shoving in the dampers, and keep me posted."

After they had gone, he sat for a while at his desk, studying the data on the papers before him. He paced the room for a few minutes, then paused to pick up the little red volume of *Ley's Space Ships*. He had no need to open it. It fell open of itself at the well-read page, and his eyes rested for one rich moment on the words: *Captain: Josiah Evans*.

What name, he wondered, feeling almost physically sick with uncer-

tainty, what name would be printed in the next edition? -

THE orchestra played melodiously at lunch time. The chef had produced delicacies even more delectable than usual, and at each table the waiters poured sparkling white wine into long-stemmed glasses, while murmuring softly, "Compliments of the Captain!"

"Is this a special occasion?" asked Tanya.

"Not that I know of, miss."

"Every meal feels like a special occasion," said Alan, "because I get to talk to you."

"Sh-h! Here come the Halls."

Tom and Dorothy flitted in to the table, hand in hand, still absorbed in the wonder of being together, scarcely aware of the world about them, then left, without finishing their dessert. Alan and Tanya looked after them with affectionate amusement, but Professor Larrabee seemed withdrawn and a little sad, as though they evoked memories of a time now lost to him forever.

"They make me feel so *old*!" said Tanya.

"And lonely?"

"Perhaps, a little. They seem so sure, somehow, that all the rest of their lives will be just as happy as this, always."

"And why not?" said Professor Larrabee.

The orchestra swayed into a final soft chord, and immediately a voice spoke from a loudspeaker in the ceiling.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Conversation stopped, the room became quiet.

"Ladies and gentlemen. The customary lifeboat drill will be held this afternoon at 1600 hours. The attendance of all passengers is requested."

The voice stopped, the orchestra resumed its playing, and the passengers sipped their coffee.

"I wonder why he said 'customary'?" said Tanya. "We've been out about three weeks, and this will be the first drill we've had. Do you suppose something is wrong?"

"I'm afraid your sense of the dramatic gets the better of you," said Alan. "What could be wrong with the *Star Lord*?"

"Maybe her name," murmured Professor Larrabee, and his eyes looked haunted.

SOLITARY at his table, Burl Jaspersen sipped at a glass of ice water as he pondered. For the first time in his life he was not quite sure what course to follow. He wanted that Blue Ribbon for the Star Line, and yet—he did not know what to do. While he listened to the announcement of the lifeboat drill, his lip twisted in contempt. Just like Josiah Ev-

ans, he thought, to be over-cautious and run the risk of starting a panic.

Still thinking, he left the dining room and went to the main lounge to study the illuminated map of the ship. The three-dimensional panorama showed the slim and elegant body of the *Star Lord*, tapered like a silver spindle. Six small ships, three on each side of the long axis, each capable of carrying 250 people, were fastened into her hulk. Seemingly a part of the ship itself, their outer walls forming a part of the ship's wall, they were designed to be detached at the touch of a button, and launched into space as free craft.

When the warning bells rang, he joined the crowd of passengers who were assigned to Boat F, peered at the boat through the transparent panel, and listened attentively to the instructions. It was Steward Davis, he noted approvingly, who was in charge.

"Passengers will file in through the usual port and walk to the farthest unoccupied seat, and buckle themselves into place. They have nothing further to do. Crewmen will take care of the mechanics of detaching and launching the boat. You will note that there are no separate cabins, only rows of seats as in the primitive airplanes, but you will find this no real discomfort, since the boat

would undoubtedly be picked up after a very short interval by some alerted space liner."

Jasperson raised his voice above the crowd's hum.

"What about provisioning? Are the boats stocked on Y-port?"

"No, Mr. Jasperson, except for food concentrates, and one air tank which is placed there for the greater comfort of the crewmen who must go in to clean or to make minor adjustments. The boats are not fully provisioned until the need arises. After all, we don't want to invite trouble, do we?"

People laughed appreciatively.

"No," he went on, "if there should be an emergency, we have specially trained crewmen whose job it is to stock reserves of air and water. They would go to work as automatically and efficiently as machines. Any other questions?"

Jasperson lingered after the indifferent crowd, to inspect the boat more closely, then slouched away.

ALL that afternoon he prowled the ship, trying to make up his mind. He stopped now and then to question a business acquaintance, ask a journalist his opinion, and he quizzed Larrabee again, more sharply than before, about the hypothetical Ripples. He kept moving, and as he walked he calculated, bringing to bear all the power of a mind which he believed

to be logical, and which his financial success had proved to be keen and intelligent. All his life he had trusted his judgment, and it had rarely failed him — barring accidents like that unfair poker game. At last, as the hours went on, his decision crystallized. He had made up his mind.

At dinner he drank champagne in addition to his usual ice water, and only half heard the scraps of conversation in the dining room. There was to be a special masquerade dance, he gathered. People around him were excitedly planning the improvisation of costumes. He would not get himself up in any silly costume, he decided, but if his plans went well, he might look in later in the evening, on the chance to being allowed to glide over the waxed floor with the lovely Tanya.

After finishing his last drop of coffee he went directly to the cabin of Captain Evans, who had just begun to eat his simple dinner.

The Chairman of the board of directors pulled up a chair and sat down, without waiting to be asked.

"Look here, Josiah, I want to talk to you. I've been thinking. I'm afraid I was too brusque this morning. That's a bad habit of mine, and I want to apologize. But after all, we should not be quarreling, for your interests and mine

are the same, as you surely realize."

Captain Evans pushed away his tray, lit a cigar, and puffed stolidly. "I realize that I must consider the safety of my passengers, if that's what you mean."

"That's included, of course." Jaspersen made his voice warm and persuasive, the voice that had swayed boards of directors, the voice that reassured hesitant bankers.

"Passenger safety is always paramount, of course, and I respect your attitude there. But in this particular case, isn't it possible that you are being too cautious?"

"But Burl! Can the Captain of a ship *ever* be too cautious? Think of his responsibility!"

"His responsibility is very great, and I would never advise you, nor permit you, to shirk yours. But sometimes caution may cease to be a virtue. Think about this caution of yours for a minute. Surely you believe that I would never urge you to do anything against the interests of the ship, or against your own conscience? Now you have an excellent mind—logical, objective, clear. That was one reason we chose you for this place. Try to consider, for a moment, the bare possibility that your decision to reduce speed may not have been justified."

EVANS was silent, and finally Burl asked, "How far did we get today?"

"240 Light years."

"And if you decide to continue at that speed for five or six days, that means we'll be approximately three days behind schedule in touching Almazin III?"

"About that."

"And that means we won't break the record. Now consider the reason for this very unhappy situation. Think about it with an open mind. You have one Pile heating—but has that never happened to a ship before, even in normal space? You and I both know it happens, and that ships have been lost because of a defective Pile. Logically, why shouldn't this be just another such case? You say it is caused by the Ripples, but as man to man, what objective evidence can you bring forward to prove their existence? I'm not trying to browbeat you, you understand, but just to ask you to look at the matter carefully. You said yourself, this morning, that you hadn't expected to be meeting the Ripples at this point—you had thought they occurred in a rather different area of hyperspace. Couldn't that mean that they don't really exist, anywhere?"

Captain Evans wiped his glistening forehead with his handkerchief.

"Yes," he said. "I was surprised. I'll admit I didn't expect them here. But there's so much we don't know about hyperspace!"

"No, there's so much we *do* know! Are you a child, to fancy there are goblins outside just because it's dark? There is a perfectly rational, alternative explanation for the things that worry you. Why can't you accept them?"

Evans got up and began to pace the floor. "I guess I'm following a hunch."

"But would you make us lose the Blue Ribbon for a mere hunch? Don't you trust your own objective judgment?"

Sweating heavily, the Captain tried to stub out his cigar, but his hands were moist and his fingers trembled.

"I don't know!" he shouted. Then he went on, his voice low and tired. "You may be right, Burl. You may be right. We may not have hit the Ripples. The Ripples may not even exist, although some very competent spacemen and some very brilliant physicists are convinced they do. But how can I judge? How can I be sure?"

Jasperson leaned forward, intent as a cat on a bird.

"None of the other Piles have started to heat? There's nothing else to make you suspicious?"

"Nothing except the space record tape, and that makes no sense."

"Exactly. Then why don't you look at this situation as a hard-headed spaceman should, and order full speed ahead?"

"Burl, there are fifteen hundred lives dependent on me. How can I take such a chance?"

"It wouldn't be a chance. And if by the one unlucky chance in ten million there should be trouble, you have ample lifeboat space for everyone. Isn't it worth the gamble?"

"I don't like gambling lives against a piece of blue silk ribbon."

JASPERSON sighed. "Come, Josiah, be reasonable. I wouldn't think of giving you an order, or trying to interfere with your decision in any way, but surely I may be allowed to help you to reach the correct decision? How will you feel when the *Star Lord* limps into port four or five days late, and you have to explain to the Board that she was delayed because you were trying to dodge some non-existent Ripples. You are afraid! Change your frightened point of view, and that will make you change your orders and get us on the way once more, full speed!"

Muttering to himself, wiping his brow, Captain Evans walked around the little room, while Jasperson sat back and watched him

with cold, intent eyes. Evans glanced once at the little red book, half covered with papers, and pain contorted his face.

Suddenly he stepped to his desk and called Engineer Wyman.

"What about that space tape, Wyman? Has Smith been able to detect any pattern in the impulses?"

"No, sir. No pattern of any sort we can recognize, anyway."

"And what report on Pile Ten?"

"Pile Ten is doing nicely, sir. Lost half a degree in the last hour. By tomorrow she ought to be back to normal limits."

Clicking the phone, Evans resumed his pacing in the heavy silence. At last he faced Jasperson and spread out his palms, his face gray as parchment.

"All right, Burl. You're probably right. I won't argue any longer."

"Good man! The Star Line will know how to appreciate your decision." He hesitated, and asked, "You'll agree, now, I didn't push you into this? It's your own free decision?"

Calmly, Evans answered. "It is my own responsibility."

He buzzed Operations.

"Wyman? Captain Evans speaking. Full speed ahead!"

ON the dance floor late that night, a crooner in blue Venetian mask and wig hummed the

melody while the orchestra wailed and zinged behind him. The lights had been dimmed to a purple midnight, and shadowy couples flitted about the room, swaying, humming, laughing. Horned devils danced with angels, pirates and Roman senators guided in their arms lovely Cleopatras and sinuous mermaids. Hunched over the little tables, clinking glasses, grotesque silhouettes of Martians, Venusians, and Apollonians whispered intimately.

The walls of the room displayed the evening stars of late summer, and, special event for a gala evening, a fat yellow half moon sailed lazily in the sky.

The *Star Lord* shuddered, briefly. Briefly the crooner's voice wavered, the notes of the violins hesitated, but no one noticed. A second quiver of the ship, and the dancers paused to look at one another questioningly, then laughed and danced on.

Jasperson had been sitting beside the wall, vainly searching among the dancers for Tanya. He stood up, his forehead suddenly wet with sweat. Plowing through the dancers and out of the door, in the corridor he ran into Steward Davis, gliding along on silent, slipped feet.

"What was that, Davis?"

"Don't know, sir. Nothing serious, or the alarm lights would be

on."

"Come with me."

He flung open the door of the Captain's cabin. It was empty. Stacey was not in the anteroom, and the inner cabin was silent. The water carafe had been turned over on the desk, and a few papers lay scattered on the floor.

"They might be in Operations, sir."

"Show me the way!" They raced down the corridors, past the open door of the room where dancers still swayed and the orchestra still played. Through a hall, down an escalator, down, down, to the center of the ship.

Jasperson paused. "You needn't wait, Davis. But I may want you again. I'll let you know."

Pushing aside the crewmen who stood guard at the door, he rushed into the room.

"Josiah! What was that shock? I demand to know what's happened!"

Evans threw him a glance of pure, intense hatred, and then resumed his questioning of Chief Wyman.

"You say Number Ten just let go?"

"Not exactly, sir. For a couple of hours or so after we resumed speed, it stayed steady. All of a sudden, it started to climb. They called me, but by the time I got there it was already at critical lev-

el. We put in more dampers, but it kept going up and up, and I thought it might vaporize any minute. I hadn't any choice, sir. There wasn't time to call you and get orders. I had to drop it."

"Certainly. I'm not criticizing you. But there's one thing we hadn't counted on. Chief Thayer says Pile Ten took lifeboat C along with it."

"But how could that happen?"

"Boat C was just above, you remember. The heat triggered the release mechanism, and the boat launched itself into space."

Jasperson interrupted, trying to speak calmly. "What's happened? Tell me what's wrong?"

"We've hit the imaginary Thakura Ripples," Evans said savagely, "and they're tearing us apart!"

The plump soft body of Burl Jasperson seemed to deflate. The truculence drained from his face, leaving his skin a dirty white as he whispered, "Then the Thakura Ripples *are* real? And we're in danger?"

The Captain's laugh was bitter. "What do *you* think? Don't you want to give me the benefit of your advice now?"

Again the door burst open, and a crewman ran in.

"Captain Evans, sir. Piles Fourteen and Fifteen have started to heat. They're already at critical level."

"Dump them!"

The phone buzzed, and Evans listened with a face which was turning a graveyard gray.

"If you can hold them down, keep them. If they pass the critical point, shoot them away." Turning, he looked straight into the dilated eyes of Jasperson, and spoke as if every word were a knife thrusting into the pudgy body.

"Every one of the Piles is starting to heat. Every last one. One life boat is lost. That means fifteen hundred people to be crowded into five little boats!"

"What are you going to do?" croaked the little man.

"I've already reduced speed. I've sent out and am still sending out calls for help, over phase wave. We'll shift to normal space, and we'll launch the lifeboats as soon as they can be provisioned and loaded. And then we'll pray. And now, Burl Jasperson, how do you like the Thakura Ripples?"

Bracing himself against the desk, Burl tried to smile. "If there's any way I can help, of course, just let me know." With a feeble attempt at jauntiness, he staggered out of the cabin.

OPENING the long-closed shutter of the observation port, Captain Evans could see the suns of normal space glittering in the blackness about the ship, unfamiliar

iar and alien. Before the shift to normal space he had sent out SOS calls throughout the galaxy, but he had not waited for any replies before shifting. He could not know whether the calls had been heard, or even whether there were any ships close enough to send help after hearing the calls. He hoped, with all his being, that they had come out in a region of inhabited planet systems, in a regular shipping lane, so that his passengers could be picked up and taken to port—any port.

He kept his line open to Operations, and every minute or so Wyman spoke to him, giving the data on the climbing piles. Ten had been jettisoned in hyperspace, and so had Fourteen and Fifteen. Since their shift to normal space, it had been necessary also to detach the entire bank of Nineteen, Twenty, and Twenty-one, whose index had risen at a terrifying rate.

Wyman's voice spoke in his ear. "One, Two, and Three are climbing fast, sir."

"Shoot them away!"

"No good, sir. I've tried. The release mechanism has fused, and those three Piles are welded to the ship!"

Evans closed his eyes. That meant that the life of the ship was doomed. There would be no way to save her. But the passengers could still be saved, if they got away

soon enough, before the three Piles vaporized.

"Wyman!" he whispered despairingly, "is there any single Pile that isn't heating?"

"No, sir."

"Is there any single Pile that's responding to your dampers?"

"No, sir, not one."

"Then, in your experience, they are all bound to go, sooner or later?"

"I've never seen anything like this in my experience, sir. It looks bad."

The door opened, and Jasperson slunk in. His skin had lost its cushioning, gray folds sagged under his cheek bones, and black hollows outlined his glittering blue eyes. The Captain ignored him, and spoke into the phone.

"Very well. In exactly fifteen minutes I shall sound the alarm and we'll abandon ship. I can't take a chance on waiting any longer. Keep a skeleton crew at work on those Piles to hold them down as much as possible, and have all other crewmen report to their lifeboat stations."

"Right, sir. But Boat C has gone, you remember. When we dumped Pile Ten."

"Yes. Distribute her passengers among the remaining boats."

He turned to look at Jasperson, who was shivering as though he were freezing.

"Is there no hope, Josiah? Is this the end?"

"The end of the *Star Lord*, yes. I hope to save the passengers. You heard me. In fifteen minutes all preparations should be finished, then I sound the alarm. Don't worry, Burl. There's room enough for everybody, your skin is safe."

"But won't the lifeboats be horribly crowded?"

"Crowded, yes, but not impossible so. If they can carry two hundred and fifty people in fair comfort, they can jam in three hundred by squeezing a bit."

Jasperson shuddered. "So many people! And so close together! I can't bear crowds, Josiah, you know that. They make me feel sick and confused. It will be terrible!"

"Whether you like it or not, there's nothing else to do if we want to save lives. I'll sound the alarm in a quarter of an hour. Get yourself ready, but whatever you do, don't tell the others yet. I don't want a panic on my hands until I'm ready to deal with it."

Biting his lip, Jasperson turned, without a word, and shuffled out of the cabin.

ONCE in the corridor, he began to run, a shrivelled old man waddling on wings of fear down the hall to the dining room where empty tables waited in the elegant

silence of gleaming silver and crisp white linen for the breakfast hour.

Davis was standing at the sideboard, staring blankly at the flashing red light above the door.

Jasperson ran up to him and clutched his arm. Looking around cunningly to see that they were alone, he whispered.

"Davis, I want to talk to you."

"Later, sir. That red light means I'm wanted at the briefing room."

"Yes, but wait a minute!"

"I'm supposed to go at once, sir."

"A thousand credits if you'll listen to me a minute!"

As Davis hesitated, Burl went on. "Listen, Davis, the ship is in trouble. The Captain is going to launch the lifeboats. You're in charge of Boat F, aren't you? You know how to operate it?"

"Of course, Mr. Jasperson."

"Then come with me, and we'll take the boat now. I'll pay you well."

"But we can't do that!"

"Why not? The *Star Lord* is doomed. In fifteen minutes this place will be a madhouse, and there may not be room for everybody. I want to get out of here before the mob. We'll take Boat F."

Steward Davis' eyes were thoughtful as he replied. "But sir, we can't just take a boat for ourselves, like that. There's two hun-

dred and fifty people assigned to Boat F."

"Worse than that! Three hundred! One lifeboat has been lost already. It's dangerous to wait—there'll be a stampede and the lifeboats might even be wrecked. No, we must take her alone, Davis. I'll give you ten thousand credits if you'll do it, and as long as you live you'll have me as a friend."

The steward's little eyes looked sidewise at the pleading man. "But I'd be found out for sure, Mr. Jasperson, and then what would become of me? I'd never get another job as long as I lived. I'd have to change my name, disguise myself, and maybe live on some other planet, and all that would take money. I'm a poor man, and I don't see how I could afford it."

"But if I have to squeeze into one of those boats with three hundred other people crowding against me, I'll go crazy! We'll go to some out-of-the-way planet, and you can change your identity and be perfectly safe. Can't you understand, man? My life is at stake, and my sanity. I'll give you fifteen thousand credits!"

"Well," said Davis. "Could you make it twenty-five?"

"Done! Meet me at Boat F in five minutes."

Jasperson rushed to his cabin. Yanking open the wall safe he dragged out his brief case and the

locked memorandum book, thrust his pistol into his pocket, and ran to the door.

"Follow me!" he called to his startled secretary, and hurried from the room.

Running past the library door, he glimpsed Tanya at work, her auburn head bent over her sketching. On impulse, he stopped and ran back.

Panting from the physical punishment of running, nearly smothered by the pounding of his terrified heart, he gasped out his invitation.

"Tanya! The ship is going to blow up! Don't tell anyone. Come with me now, before the crowd, and I'll get you off safely in my lifeboat. I'll take care of you, Tanya."

She pulled away. "Have you lost your mind, Mr. Jasperson?"

"Don't argue. There's no time. Come, I'll protect you. We'll have plenty of room. If you wait, it may be too late."

"Go with you, and leave the others? You're mad!"

"But if you wait, you'll be trampled to death by the mob. I'm giving you a chance to save your life."

"But you can't take that boat for yourself. What would happen to the other people? That would be murder. Get away from me! I'm going to call Captain Evans."

As she ran to the phone and pressed the dial, he padded out of the door and resumed his flight to Boat F where Davis waited, peering nervously up and down the hall. Waving his secretary to follow, Jasperson rushed through the port.

"Everything ready, Davis? Provisions all in?"

"All set. I saw the tail end of the truck leaving just as I got here, but I'll just check—"

"Hurry, man! There's no time to waste." He cocked his head, listening to the low rumble of an approaching motor. Davis ran inside, and together they watched from the port.

Coming swiftly down the corridor was a small motor truck. It stopped, and the driver jumped out and shouted.

"Get out of that boat! She's not ready yet! What are you—"

With a steady hand Jasperson drew his pistol and pressed the trigger. The man fell without a sound.

"What are you waiting for, Davis? Shove off!"

The port door slid shut. A few seconds delay, and Lifeboat F, carrying three persons, shot away from the *Star Lord* into space.

ALARM bells rang, red lights flashed.

Sickening with the inexorable rise of her fevered power units, the

Star Lord trembled with the clangor of bells ringing in library and nursery, in lounges and dance hall, in bar and cabins, in dining rooms and theaters. The orchestra crashed to a stop, the dancers halted, startled and vaguely frightened, half laughing at themselves as they listened to the bells.

Then silence, and the voice of Captain Evans.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Do not be alarmed. Because of certain mechanical difficulties the *Star Lord* has shifted to normal space. There is no immediate danger, but purely as a precautionary measure we shall launch the lifeboats. Remember, there is no danger, but I ask each of you to proceed at once, in calm orderly fashion, to the station to which you are assigned, and there obey the orders of the officer in charge. The passengers formerly assigned to Boat C will be placed in other boats. Do not wait to go to your cabins. Proceed immediately to your lifeboats."

The voice clicked off. A few seconds of silence, and then the quiet was broken by the patter of hurrying feet. In a moment, the public lounges were empty.

* * *

In the library, Tanya was still calling into the phone.

"Operator, operator!" she cried. "I must speak to the Captain. It's a matter of life and death!" But



the phone was dead.

When the alarm bells rang, she listened to the announcement and then slowly put back the useless instrument. Back in her corner, she picked up her chalk, shuffled her drawings into an orderly heap, paused, and with a wry smile dropped them all to the floor and hurried away.

A sound of crying wailed from the open door of the playroom, and she looked in to see a group of children, none of them more than six, huddled together and sobbing. She walked up to them and smiled, hands on her hips.

"Well, small fry! What are you doing up so late? Why the big

howls?"

Still they cried, ignoring their abandoned toys. Around the room hobby horses sat quietly, alphabet blocks lay scattered, and picture books and sprawling dolls littered the floor.

"So," she said. "Your nurses ran out on you, did they? Left you to shift for yourselves? Never mind, youngsters, Aunt Tanya will look after you. Take hands, now, and come with me."

WHEN the alarm rang in the Bar, a glass crashed to the floor as the only son of the deuterium millionaire jumped to his feet and ran.



Professor Larrabee deliberately finished his drink, gently put down the glass, and stood up.

"Our final spacecap," he said. "Well, Alan, it's been a good trip, but I can't say I'm surprised at its ending. The ship had the wrong name, from the beginning."

"We'd better hurry, Professor. We must find Tanya and the Halls."

"You're walking too fast for me, my boy. Don't worry. They're in Boat F, with us, and we're sure to find them there."

In the corridor leading to F station their way was blocked by the crowd, many of them still wearing the grotesque costumes of the masquerade dance, now pale and tawdry in the bright lights. Stunned with horror, they stared through the transparent wall at the gaping socket where the lifeboat had been. Crewmen formed a tight circle around the truck and the man who lay moaning on the floor. Pistols ready, they held back the crowd while Dr. Willoughby administered an intravenous shot of panedol, and Captain Evans, kneeling beside the dying man, tried to catch his whispers.

"It was Mr. Jaspersen, sir. He got me before I could do a thing. I tried to stop him."

"You say you warned him?"

"I called to him, sir, and said the boat wasn't ready. But he

didn't give me a chance. He shot me."

The boy closed his eyes, and Evans stood up.

"Through an error, ladies and gentlemen, Boat F has already gone. You will please go to the other stations and wait for assignment to the other boats."

The crowd whispered, staring incomprehendingly at the Captain's stony face.

"Did you ever teach mathematics, Professor?" Alan murmured. "How do you divide fifteen hundred people among four boats?"

Larrabee only smiled, a faraway look in his eyes.

A frightened voice cried, high and loud, "But there won't be enough room!"

Someone screamed. Someone else started to run. In a few seconds a mob of running, panic-stricken people jammed the corridor, fighting their way out. Alan and the professor, an old man and an invalid, had no strength to resist and were helplessly carried along by the living wave.

"Stop those people!" shouted the Captain.

A gun fired into the air and the mob hesitated, then surged on, shouting, past the lounges, to join the throngs waiting at the other stations.

"It's no use," said Evans wearily. "Chief Thayer. Send men to

all the stations to guard the boats. You proceed to Boat E and load it first. If any person tries to force his way in, shoot to kill!"

IN their small cabin, Dorothy Hall raised herself on one elbow and looked down at her sleeping husband. His hair was rumpled, his face calm and placid.

"Tom," she whispered. "Wake up, Tom!" Mumbling sleepily, he opened his eyes, then smiled and tried to draw her down to him.

"Wait, Tom. Did you hear the Captain's message?"

"What message?"

"I was so sleepy I didn't understand it very well. Something about the ship, and we must all go to our lifeboats."

"You must have been dreaming. What time is it?"

"Not quite midnight. Do you think everything is all right?"

"Of course. You just had a bad dream. The *Star Lord* can't be in any trouble. You know that."

"Don't you think we ought to go see?"

Playfully he tousled her hair. "Trying to get away from your husband? Tired of me already?"

Relaxing, she snuggled down beside him with a happy sigh.

"I'd never be tired of you, Tom, in a million years. Wherever you are, that's where I want to be, always."

She closed her eyes.

* * *

The children were no longer afraid, and they had stopped crying. Leading them through the maze of corridors towards Boat station F, Tanya laughed and told them jokes until, reaching a corner, she suddenly found the passage blocked with a screaming mass of people, fighting, gouging, jamming the hall so that forward movement was almost impossible. She drew back, huddling the children behind her.

"No place for us here, youngsters," she said. "Let's go back, where it isn't so noisy."

Obediently they followed her back to the library, where she settled them in her favorite corner and picked up the abandoned chalk and paper.

"Now Aunt Tanya will tell you a story," she said. "And if you're very good and don't cry at all, I'll even draw you some pictures to go with the story. Once upon a time . . ."

* * *

There was not enough room. A lifeboat which had been designed to carry two hundred and fifty persons could not suddenly expand to take in three hundred and seventy-five, although Chief Thayer did his best. At Boat E he stood with drawn pistol, sorting the crowd, and ordering them one by

one through the port according to custom as ancient as the race.

"Women and children first," he repeated, again and again. "*Women and children first!*"

They could hear from distant corridors an occasional shout and the clatter of running feet, but the first panic had subsided, and under the menace of the crew's guns the people had become subdued.

White-faced men stepped back and made themselves inconspicuous in the shadows, watching their wives and children file through the port, and looking after them hungrily. Once, a man screamed and tried to crash through the cordon. Thayer shot him, and he fell moaning to the floor. Dr. Willoughby moved through the crowd, soothing the hysterical, jollying the frightened, until he spied Alan Chase standing at the edge of the group.

He pushed through to Alan and threw his arm around the bony shoulder, encouragingly.

"I'm assigned to this first boat, Chase, and they'll want you in one of the others. We want at least one medical man in each boat. But I must warn you—" he looked around cautiously, but they might have been alone in a desert for all chance there was of anyone's listening to them, "be sure to get off in Boats B or D. Don't wait for Boat A."

"What difference does it make?"

"Boat A lies above two of the Piles that had to be dumped, and the radioactivity index is sure to be high. Normal people won't be harmed in the brief time they'll be on board if they're rescued, and if they're not rescued, of course, it won't matter anyway. Even you might not be harmed, but with your condition you shouldn't take the risk."

"But does it really matter?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we'd counted on my reaching Almazin III quickly and living in an inert atmosphere in order to cure the neosarcoma. Now that the *Star Lord* is wrecked, I may not be able to get there for months, and that will be too late. If I'm going to die, I'd rather stay with the ship and get it over with."

"Don't be an idiot, doctor! Don't you realize how much better you are? The mitosis was definitely decreasing the last time I checked you. This delay won't be fatal, I'm convinced."

Alan shook his head skeptically.

"Dr. Willoughby!" called Thayer. "Boat ready to launch!"

A grip of the hand, and he had gone. The port shut.

Boat E, jammed with three hundred and twenty-five persons, released itself and shot out into star-studded space.

BOAT B was the second to be launched, and Boat D followed.

Keeping to the back of the crowds, Alan watched, admiring the efficiency with which Chief Thayer worked, shouting, wheedling, cursing, until three hundred and thirty people were squeezed in, like frightened cattle in a pen.

There remained only Boat A, and from the shadows he watched nearly five hundred tense faces, drawn with the anxiety of wondering who was to go, and who remain.

Good thing the women and children had all been taken off in the earlier boats, Alan reflected thankfully. It would be heartbreaking enough for Thayer to have to choose among the men, and say to some, *Go*, and to some, *Stay*.

Captain Evans appeared, flanked by Thayer and Stacey, each with drawn pistol. He faced the silent crowd and spoke with terrifying calm.

"I will take charge here," he said. "I cannot ask Thayer to take on such a responsibility. I am sure it is not necessary to tell you that there is not room enough in this boat for all of you. If rescue ships arrive in time, those who must remain behind will be taken off. If not—I realize that no human being has the right arbitrarily to send some men to life and

keep others for possible death. But since choice of some sort is necessary to avoid a panic which might result in unnecessary deaths, I shall choose which ones are to enter this boat, as nearly as possible according to the random positions in which you are now standing. Anyone trying to change his place will be shot!"

No one moved. No one spoke.

"Thayer, you will send in two crewmen to help run the boat. You yourself will be the last man in, to take command. As for the rest—" He paused, wiped his hand over his reddened eyes, and staggered. In a few seconds he had regained control of himself, and with shoulders erect he pointed his arm and called out,

"You go, and you, and you, and you . . ."

Alan heard a low chuckle behind him, and turned to find Professor Larrabee.

"What a climax, my boy! Do you believe in premonitions, now?"

"Why haven't you gone?"

"Too old, Alan. I don't want to go. My life is done. But I can't say I really mind. It's been a wonderful adventure, sharing the life and death of the *Star Lord*."

The boat was nearly half full when the tense quiet was broken by the treble voice of a child.

Captain Evans whirled to face the corridor, along which came

Tanya, holding to the hands of the two smallest children, while the others clung tightly to the stiff folds of her taffeta gown.

His stare was ghastly. "Miss Taganova! I thought you'd gone! Where have you been? And why weren't these children sent off in the other boats? Didn't you hear the warnings?"

"Somebody's always scolding me for being late," said Tanya, lightly. "But I really couldn't help it. These children seem to have been abandoned by the nursemaids and lost or forgotten by their parents. I have been trying to amuse them until it seemed safe to bring them to you. If I'd come before they would have been trampled to death."

"Well, luckily it's not too late. In you go, the lot of you."

The six youngsters were scrambling through the port, and the Captain had resumed his "You, and you, and you..." when Alan darted forward and clasped Tanya's hand.

"I just want you to know," he whispered. "If the *Star Lord* had gone on to port I'd never have dared say it. But since it can't matter now, Tanya—I'd like you to know—"

She smiled. "I know, Alan. I've known it for many days. And I'd have made a good doctor's wife, I think!" Her lips were trembling

as she turned away and entered the port.

"Dr. Chase!" roared the Captain. "What are you doing here? You were supposed to go on Boat D!"

"There isn't room for all of us, Captain. I thought the healthy men should have the preference. I prefer to stay here."

"Personal preferences mean nothing at all at this moment. Get into the boat."

"Let some one else have my place, sir. I haven't long to live anyway, you know. I don't mind staying behind."

THE Captain steadied his pistol. "Get in. That's an order. This is no time for mock heroics. You should have gone with Boat D to look after the women and children. Whether you live a month or a year doesn't matter to me, but it is important that you use your medical skill to take care of these people until they are rescued."

With a dazed look, Alan walked through the port.

"And you, and you, and you . . ."

Thayer called out at last. "That's all, sir. No more room."

"None at all? You're sure?"

"Certain, sir. The tally is three hundred and thirty . . ."

Nearly a hundred men remained

in the corridor. Ashen-faced but calm, they stared at the rectangular doorway which would have meant a chance to live.

"In you go, Thayer," said the Captain. "Prepare to release."

Into the tense silence broke the brittle clicking of high heels as Tom and Dorothy Hall sauntered up, arm in arm, a puzzled frown on their foreheads.

The Captain moaned. "Another woman! Wait, Thayer. We've one more woman here. Which one of you men in Boat A will volunteer to give up his place to young Mrs. Hall?"

An elderly man walked serenely back into the ship, and joined the others.

Dorothy looked bewildered. "But what's happened? We kept hearing so much noise we decided to get up. Is something wrong?"

"We're abandoning ship. This gentleman is giving up his place to you. Get in."

She clung to Tom's arm. "Not without my husband!"

"Mrs. Hall! We can't waste time on hysterics. This ship might be vaporized while we're talking. A man has given up his chance at life for you. Get in."

She held back. "And Tom?"

With a haggard smile, Tom patted her shoulder. "Never mind me, honey. You go jump in. I'll be all right."

"Mrs. Hall, I'm willing to deprive one man of his chance, because you are a woman. But I will not ask anyone else to give up his place to your husband. Every man in the lifeboat has as much right to his life as your husband, and so has every man who must be left behind. Go, now. It's your last chance!"

Her face had become calm and all hint of tears was gone. Without hesitating she looked up at her husband and spoke softly.

"Tell the man to go back. Whether we live or we die, we'll do it together." Smiling at Tom, she took his hand to lead him away.

"Come, Tom. Let's go look at the sky. I believe these stars are real ones."

"Close the port!"

The door slid shut. A minute's long wait, then the boat released herself and shot out into the blackness. The last of the lifeboats was gone.

Professor Larrabee materialized from the shadows and approached Evans with outstretched hand.

"Well done, Captain!"

"You here? I'd hoped you'd gone with the others."

"What for? My life is over. I've had my pleasures. And this way, I shall be seeing my wife all the sooner. She always loved adventure, and I shall tell her all about the Thakura Ripples. Will

you join me in a drink, Captain Evans?"

"No, thank you." His voice broke. "No. I need to be alone." He turned and strode away.

In the privacy of his cabin he buzzed operations.

"What news, Wyman?"

"Slow, steady climb, sir. All piles have passed critical stage."

Slowly he replaced the phone, and covered his eyes.

HUDDLED against the wall of boat F, Burl Jasperson stared out of the observation port, his cold eyes intent on the distant, fast receding lights of the *Star Lord*. Now that he felt himself to be safe, he was weak and exhausted. Beside him sat his secretary, a wizened little man who stared numbly at his clasped hands.

Jasperson coughed.

"Yes, Mr. Jasperson?"

"Get me a panedol tablet and a glass of water. I don't suppose there's any ice, but if there is, put in some ice. I'm thirsty."

Meekly the secretary shuffled down the long length of the boat, solitary as a ghost, to the cubicle labelled Rations. He was gone a long time, thought Burl, and when at last he returned his feet were dragging more than ever.

"There isn't any water, Mr. Jasperson."

"You idiot! There's got to be

water."

"I couldn't find any, Mr. Jasperson."

"Davis!" he roared. "Davis, get me a glass of water!"

Davis looked out from the control room. "Get it yourself. This isn't the ship's dining room any more, Jasperson. I've got other things to do now than taking orders from you."

"But I don't know where it is!"

"All right. I'll get it for you this time and show you where it's kept, but after this you wait on yourself."

Leading the way to Rations, he opened a steel cupboard and reached in. Suddenly anxious, he groped about frantically, then cried, "But there isn't any water!"

Jasperson swallowed, with dry throat.

"There isn't any water?" he asked plaintively. "But I'm *thirsty!*"

As the hours crawled by, Jasperson sat in the vast emptiness of the boat and stared out at the alien stars. He could not bear to look at the long rows of empty seats, seats that might have been occupied by living men, two hundred and forty-seven silent, omnipresent accusers. His eyes were glowing coals, his skin sagged in wrinkles over his haggard face, and his voice was a mere croak.

"Are you *sure* there's no water?" he asked again. "Are you certain?"

"Yes, I'm certain, as I've told you a thousand times," said Steward Davis. "Don't you suppose I'm thirsty too? If you hadn't been in such a hurry to sneak away we'd have been all right. That man you shot was probably getting ready to load the water tanks."

"But you told me the boat was all provisioned!"

"I thought it was, when I saw the tail-end of that truck! But you didn't give me time to check. Why did you have to be in such a hurry?"

Groaning, Jasperson turned again to peer at the unfamiliar suns.

"How long will it take us to reach an inhabited planet, do you think?"

"I don't know, because I don't know just where we are. With luck, maybe a week, maybe two."

"How long can we live without water?"

"Longer than you'd think. Twelve to fifteen days if we don't move around. We may be able to land somewhere before then. If not—" His voice rose to a sudden shriek. "*What good are those twenty-five thousand credits going to do me now?*"

The secretary sat in numb collapse, but Jasperson prowled the

room, up and down, up and down, past the rows of empty seats, while Davis sat and watched him with glittering eyes. Jasperson's head was aching, and he was aware, all at once, that he was out of breath, as though he had been climbing a steep hill under a broiling sun.

"Have to see to this," he muttered. "They can't treat me this way." Stumbling, he lurched down the aisle towards Davis, staggering like a drunken man.

"Got to have more air, Davis. This won't do."

Insolently, Davis got up and looked at the oxygen indicator set in the wall.

"Needle's falling a bit. I'll turn on another tank." He touched the switch, then sat down again.

Jasperson began to laugh.

"What's so funny?"

With shaking hand he pointed, laughing harder, his sagging cheeks quivering as he roared:

"It's those chairs! Ever see such silly chairs? The way they sit there, and look at you?"

"Hey, man, you're drunk! I wonder . . ."

He got up to look at the oxygen dial again. The needle had fallen still further.

"Where's that oxygen?" he shouted. He rushed into the inner compartment and was back immediately, his eyes black with terror.

"No air reserve either! Only that one tank! You great, blundering, condemned fool! A man can live for fifteen days without water, but he can't live ten minutes without air. We're done for!"

Jasperson giggled.

Davis collapsed, and he, too, began to laugh, a helpless, gasping laugh. They had entirely forgotten the self-effacing secretary, but the noise of their dying laughter did not disturb him. He had already fallen sideways in his chair, and would never wake again.

ON the *Star Lord*, Tom and Dorothy sat in the empty lounge, looking through the observation port at the real stars that studded the void. They were holding hands. They were not afraid, and there was nothing they needed to say.

Some of the doomed passengers sat in the Bar, drinking steadily. Others sat and stared at nothingness. Professor Larrabee lay in his cabin, his face turned to the wall, his eyes closed. But he was not sleeping. He was thinking of his wife, and a smile clothed his face.

* * *

In his cabin Captain Josiah Evans waited alone. His hair was almost white, now, his cheeks were sunken, and all semblance of youth had left him. Knowing the futility of his action, nevertheless he

completed the day's entry in the ship's log, and closed the volume.

As the hours crept by he noticed that the temperature in the room was rising. Once more, for the last time, he called Operations.

"It's no use, Wyman. Let the Piles alone. It's only a matter of hours now—or perhaps minutes."

"Shall I cast loose the other Piles, sir?"

"No, no use in that, since you can't jettison Piles One, Two and Three. When they go, we all go. It's impossible, now; that any rescue ship could get to us in time. You've done a good job, Wyman. You are now released from duty."

His hands were sweating, his whole body was wet from the high summer torridness of the room. Captain Evans wiped his sticky hands on his handkerchief and picked up the little red book, *Ley's Space Ships*. Opening the book, he read for the last time the well-loved page. Then he took up his pen and made a new notation in the margin.

"Star Lord: Lost, May 26, 2421, on the Thakura Ripples."

He paused a moment, and then with firm, steady strokes he wrote the final entry: *"Destroyed by the arrogance of her owners, and the criminal pride and weakness of her Captain."*

He put down the pen, and laid his head on his desk.

HOUR after hour Boat A circled the dying *Star Lord*, its weary passengers tense with hope for the all but impossible rescue. Alan sat next to Tanya, guarding the sleeping children.

Suddenly she sat up. "What's that? Out there?"

Over the loudspeaker came Thayer's voice. "We have successfully made contact with a rescue ship. A space cruiser will reach us in approximately eight hours."

Tanya scarcely heard him. She was still peering out, her eyes on the faint lights of the *Star Lord*.

"Look!" she cried.

"Shut your eyes!" shouted Thayer. "Everybody turn your head!"

Far out in space where the *Star Lord* had been was a brilliant red glow, like many suns. It changed, suddenly, to a blinding light, so bright that it was more blue than white, then vanished.

Man had not yet made himself Lord of the Stars.

INTRODUCING the AUTHOR



Boyd Ellanby



(Concluded from Page 2)

in several languages, and digging for mummies in an Egyptian oasis. At various times we've earned a living of sorts by teaching, operating calculating machines, chipping the rough edges off castings in an iron foundry, and research in immunity and serology. Our favorite diversion is wandering around foreign lands, recording certain physical characteristics of the inhabitants (officially), and observing the way they think about things (unofficially). This has led us into various interesting situations, such as living in the black tents of the desert Bedouin, being house guests in a cancer hospital in Russia, participating in the

rites of the "Singers" among the Navajo Indians, entering a hard-cider-drinking and squid-eating competition with the Basques of the Pyrenees, and photographing the Taj Mahal in color.

We started reading science fiction at a tender age, and know and admire the work of contemporary S-F writers. The decision to develop our own ideas into stories was taken some years ago, but, what with one thing and another, nothing was done about it until recently. Now it has become an interest which is beginning to compete seriously with the composition of books of a purely technical nature, of which some four have already been published.





EFFIE

By

Daniel F. Galouye

Clayton Bowers had given forty-five years of his life to the firm. Now he faced replacement—by a cold, heartless machine . . .

CLAYTON Bowers opened the door and his thin, wrinkled hand froze on the knob.

It was here! They had installed it over the week end. Without even warning him—without asking his advice on even the minor details.

A forlorn breath escaped his lips and his lean legs felt a little

weaker, his sagging shoulders a little more stooped. He ran a hand over his damp, shiny head, as though to press in place hair that had long since retreated to the fringe zone near his temples.

"There she is, Clay." The young man at the desk nearest the door smiled teasingly, then nodded toward the far wall.

Clayton mumbled a dry good morning and started across the room.

Until last week it had been "Mr. Bowers" whenever he went through to the inner office with "Personnel Manager" printed on its door. Occasionally there had been an affectionate "chief" used.

But now it was on different—almost mocking—terms. It was no secret that the thing against the opposite wall was responsible for the change.

He stood before it, breathing heavily, surveying its broad expanse of glittering chrome. Abruptly he sensed the eyes of half a dozen clerks on his back. One of them laughed. "Old Clay looks like he's afraid it's going to snap at him."

"Shake hands with Effie, Mr. Bowers," said a young, usually timid girl before a filing cabinet. "You'll probably find the hand behind the third box from the left."

"Hands are the only things she doesn't have," jibed the receptionist.

Steeling himself against the unexpected, unmasked ridicule, he turned and showed them a tense smile. But it faded quickly as he looked back at Effie.

EFFIE had a voice. It came from the metal cabinet on the left. It was a background hum

against which scores of clicking relays set up their ceaseless chatter sometimes with rhythmical variation, sometimes with monotonous steadiness.

But it was not her real voice that flowed to Clayton through the air vents of the cabinet. It was only the natural cadence of Effie's electronic metabolism. Her real voice came through speakers in more than a score of booths lined against the wall like out-houses behind an Eighteenth Century barracks.

The enclosures also housed the machine's eyes and her ears and a dozen other cold sensory receptors that measured body heat and pulse rate and respiratory frequency and size and weight.

This sprawling, impersonal mass of electronic equipment, casting back the cold light of the ceiling illuminators in a dazzling array of glistening metal surfaces, was Effie.

Clayton sighed and walked to the nearest booth. Inside, brilliant lights sprang up from every corner. He cringed before X-rays that stabbed through his body and the scanning eyes that made his physical features but impulse notations on magnetic wires. Then he jumped as Effie spoke from a diaphragm over his head.

"Name, classification number and assignment designation,

please."

It was almost as though he were speaking the words. They *were* his words—his voice. All of his oral procedure in interviews had been adopted and incorporated into the machine's stimulus circuit.

"Please answer," the mocking voice insisted. "Are you a new applicant?"

Almost afraid, Clayton backed from the booth.

"Hey!" Someone grabbed his elbow and pulled him back. "Get out of there! You're scrambling the circuits. It can't be used until all the initial data's been fed in."

Clayton turned to face an over-all-clad man who held a screwdriver in one hand and a blue print in the other.

The technician turned and went into the booth on the end. Larger than the others, it was an organ that was obviously intended for some distinctive purpose in Effie's body functions.

"Sweep all circuits," the technician's authoritative voice leaked from the enclosure. "Prepare to receive basic data on non-personnel organization and function . . . Assigned responsibility: Personnel direction and procedure supervision for Monotilton Products Incorporation. Administrative staff numbers one hundred and three. Non-administrative staff: fourteen

hundred and thirty-two workers employed in four main plants . . ."

Clayton hurried into his office and closed the door, leaning against it and clinging to the knob.

Not one hundred and three administrative officials, he thought . . . one hundred and two. They could scratch one off the list now. In its place they could seat a cold, impersonal, heartless conglomeration of chromium and relays and tubes and wires.

There was perspiration on his face as he shook his head disconsolately. He had known it was coming. He had even thought he had prepared himself for it. But how mistaken he'd been! Listlessly, he walked to his desk and dropped into the chair, staring almost unseeingly outside the window at the bustle of receiving and shipping, assembly and repair and a score of other plant functions.

There were four huge buildings out there now. Forty-five years ago, when he had first come to the company, there had been only one—a shack. But he had been twenty then, and his youthful foresight could perceive even as far as the present when the small enterprise would have matured into an industrial behemoth.

And now, finally, he was being squeezed out. He laughed. *They* were doing him a favor. At least, *they* thought so. But he didn't

want to retire. He belonged with the company. It was his life. And when he left it he would be leaving his only interest behind.

HE nodded his head despairingly. At least, he thought, they could have extended the courtesy of replacing him with an energetic young man. But no . . . a cold, inhuman machine was to be his substitute.

"You saw it, Clay? Isn't it magnificent!"

Clayton looked up. It was Froman who stood before his desk—tall and stout and young and vigorous . . . Just like his dad looked forty years ago when he first enlarged the plant.

"It's very impressive, A. R. But, will it work?" Clayton wanted to bite his lips. Even against his determination he had allowed a tinge of resentment to enter his voice.

"Of course it will work." A. R. was confident. "We have every assurance. I know it's the first attempt at turning one of these, uh—machines into a personnel director. But when you consider it, the basic composition of these things makes them especially adaptable to this kind of a job."

Clayton looked out the window. How long would it be, he wondered, before they would overcome their reluctance and tell him wher

he must leave? As though in answer:

"If everything comes off all right, Clay, you can clear out of here today. Tomorrow you can be on your way to your son's." A. R.'s grin was effusive.

Clayton smiled weakly. A. R. came around the desk and gripped his shoulder. "After forty-five years we can finally spare you, Clay. Dad always said he considered no *man* capable of replacing you. I'm glad I'm able to show I agree with him."

"I think you're all wrong, A. R." It was Shields Aldinton who spoke from the open doorway. "I don't like being a dissenter, but I can't imagine a hunk of metal and wires being human enough to solve the personnel problems of an outfit this size . . . Don't you agree, Clay?"

Of course he agreed! There were fourteen hundred and thirty-two workers out there. Fourteen hundred and thirty-two men and women whom he knew as intimately as though they were all members of one family — his. They *were* his family. Didn't they all call him 'Pops'?

"I don't know, Shields," Clayton said absently. "Machines are pretty smart these days." He wondered why he was defending the contraption.

Shields laughed. "You're just

saying it because your son was the technician who conceived of adapting it to this use. I hear you suggested it to him and he convinced the heads of the Calco firm that they ought to give it a try."

It was true. He had suggested it initially. But he'd no idea Calco would concentrate on Monotilton with its sales spiel.

"We all know you want to see it succeed, Clay," said A. R. "And there's no reason why it shouldn't. They say its banks can integrate all correlative data and even consider *n*th power associations in determining . . ."

"A good sales talk," Shields broke in. "But I still can't see a tin can filled with tubes and wires calling in a welder and telling him that on the basis of all recorded impulses, the bias voltage in the rectifier tube shows he should be fired. *There's no humane element in those wires.*"

Clayton wanted to applaud, slap Shields on the back, urge him toward the other arguments against Effie. But Shields shook his head and left.

A. R. turned to Clayton. "They are feeding all the basic data into the machine now. During the next four hours we're suspending work at the plants so the personnel can be interviewed. Then we want to match Effie against you in a test."

Clayton looked puzzledly at him.

"I'm not going to give you the details now," he continued. "If I did, you might subconsciously begin solving the problem. We're going to compare your time and results with Effie's. If the answers differ, the administrative staff will judge the best one."

THROUGHOUT the morning workers filed into the outer office and lined up along the railing, waiting to enter the booths. On occasion, Clayton stood mutely in the doorway and watched their reactions through almost moist eyes. Hopelessly, he studied the familiar faces. There was Jim Sellers, one of the best workers in the assembly section. It was three years ago that the blond youth had come to the plant, entered the shipping section.

Jim would have still been there, Clayton mused, if it hadn't been for the fact that his aptitude for assembly had been disclosed accidentally during a friendly conversation. Clayton laughed. He tried to imagine Effie calling Jim in for a cup of coffee and asking him how the wife and kid was.

Jim entered the far booth. Claud Valant, next in line, walked in front of Clayton to enter the first one. "Well, Pops," he said, smiling, "looks like they got you by the seat of your pants this time,

eh?"

Clayton summoned an uncomplimentary adjective for Effie, but he restrained it. "It ought to be a lot better than me," he said. "There's surely a lot more of it."

"Don't take it so hard, Pops. Your job ain't the only thing going to hell around this place. Everything's all snagged up in assembly. I ain't gonna take their guff much longer."

"Leaving?"

"Yeah. But don't say anything. I wouldn't tell you if I didn't know I could trust you. I'm getting a better deal over at Aronite . . . Say—maybe they could use *you* over there!"

"No thanks, Claud."

The worker left and Clayton watched a technician at Effie's console on the other side of the farthest booth. His fingers played rapidly over the complicated keyboard as an assistant placed a succession of files in front of him.

Now Clayton noticed that the ceaseless chatter of the large unit was building up to an excited pitch as it digested more information—as the life of knowledge flowed into its retention cells. It was almost a greedy sound. He could imagine the thing smiling inwardly as it swelled its ego with the information it would use in a tyrannical control over the plant's personnel.

They had said it would solve problems with "pure logic"—mathematical logic. They argued it operated on the principle that all thinking was but rational manipulation of mathematical concepts, camouflaged under a covering of ideated association combinations that humans perceived as thought.

But Effie was supposed to be a "clear" thinker. She used pure, cold logic—a thought process unclouded by puzzling subjective considerations. Affability and all the other human factors were out.

There was one time, Clayton remembered, when he had not recommended the dismissal of an electrician in maintenance. Everyone was convinced the man was tapping a source of plans and selling them to a competitor. On a hunch, Clayton had suggested further consideration. The hunch was the result of intangible factors which were so subjective that he couldn't define them. He had not been wrong. The electrician's furtive actions were explained when he presented a new plan for more economical operation of the belted sheds. Had he been accused, Clayton knew, he would not have attempted to dispel the suspicions . . . He was competent enough to be in demand elsewhere.

He turned to re-enter his office. But one of the technicians tapped his shoulder. "You Bowers?"

He nodded.

"We're going to process the administrative staff right after lunch, starting with you."

"You don't understand," Clayton protested. "I don't . . ."

"My orders," the other insisted, "are to take everybody."

"But I'm leaving. You see, the machine . . ."

"If you're quitting that's your business. But we still need the data to establish a basis for future efficiency increases."

Clayton shrugged. The time he would spend arguing to escape being interviewed by his own voice would be greater than the time he would spend in a booth.

A. R. STOOD before the second booth and Clayton in front of the first. Effie's warmup hum had just become audible. Clayton started to address the other, but closed his mouth abruptly.

"Something on your mind, Clay?" A. R. asked.

He hesitated. He didn't want to seem to be cowering. Yet, if something should be said against the machine's future role in the firm, it should be said now—not after the thing had wrecked the organization with a despotic rule of ruthless impulses racing through naked wires and drinking strength in the cold vacuum of a thousand amplification tubes.

"This—machine, A. R. How can it consider *all* the factors? Do you think it's wise . . ."

"Do I think it'll make any mistakes?" the president laughed. "Ever hear about Justo?"

Clayton had heard. But he let A. R. continue.

"Justo was one of the first to be tried out in the field of human relations. It was installed in a courtroom. Certainly you must have heard of it."

Clayton nodded, the argument he had summoned melting away.

"It was set up in the capacity of an 'observer.' For three years it listened in on every murder trial. One of its booths was the prisoner's dock. Another contained the witness chair. For three years, every verdict it reached tallied precisely with the finding of the jury. Its verdict, in most cases, was the same as the judge's."

"But Justo made a mistake. He finally pronounced one defendant guilty of murder. The jury had decided the woman should go free. But two days later, in a moment of remorse, the suspect confessed and killed herself."

For a long while Clayton was silent. Then he remembered his argument. Witnesses and defendants were subjected to Justo for long hours—providing ample opportunity for the delicate receptor circuits to learn more psychologic-

ally basic information than the jury could ever gain. Similar procedure couldn't be employed in a factory. He turned to tell A. R. But the president was already entering his booth. The technician was motioning to Clayton. Reluctantly, he stepped into the enclosure.

“NAME, classification number and assignment designation, please,” ordered Effie.

Clayton hoped he hadn't sounded as abrupt when *he* interviewed personnel.

“Please answer,” the mocking voice insisted.

He gave the information, narrowing his eyes against the glare of bright lights.

“How long have you been with Monotilton?”

“Forty-five years.” The words seemed to resist pronunciation.

“You would like to remain—for how long?”

Clayton laughed. The situation was almost ridiculous. He was asking himself how long he wanted to stay in a position he was forcing himself out of—or something like that.

“Please answer,” Effie snapped sternly. “You must co-operate.” The words were spoken as harshly as the technician had instructed him to speak them into the microphone three weeks before.

“Forty-five years,” he said fa-

cetiously.

There was a pause. “Illogical answers will only bias your file circuit to the point of excessive feedback.”

Would the thing next say you're fired for insubordination? There had been a dismissal speech . . . he remembered recording it. He also recalled a hundred and thirteen other phrases he had spoken setting forth all possible causes for dismissal. But he couldn't remember having been inconsiderate enough to use the word “insubordination.”

“You would like to remain—for how long?” Evidently Effie had wiped clean his illogical answer and her reprimand.

Clayton sighed and closed his eyes. Then he wiped perspiration from his face and relinquished the forced attempt to hold his thin shoulders erect before the scrutinizing stare and searching inquisition. He would answer truthfully. “I would prefer remaining several years. I do not want to be dismissed.”

He knew what the next interrogation would be. There was only one he had recorded to serve as a subsequent stimulus to a response that represented a plea for retention by a worker facing dismissal.

“Was it incompatibility with working conditions that was responsible for dissatisfaction with

your services?"

"No. It was technological advancement making my services unnecessary."

Co-operating with the machine, he felt an unexplained sense of relief. Perhaps it was because for the first time he had the opportunity to express his disappointment, his bitterness. Perhaps it was because he was leaving behind a record of his sentiments that might condition Effie's logic in a manner that would help others who found themselves in his circumstances—maybe even Jim Sellers, if they ever considered installing a machine to oversee assembly operations.

Anyway, there was no hope now that he would not be replaced by this smoothly functioning usurper. The myriad questions and statements he had recorded were being deftly woven into a thorough conversation which he couldn't conceive falling short of its purpose. There *was* logic in the interplay of words—a cold logic whose undertone spelled only total defeat.

A. R. AND Shields were in his office again. But his back was turned as he stared dazedly out the window on the familiar scene which would be removed from his life as abruptly as though someone had snatched a painting from his living room wall.

"We'll work the test in this manner, Clay," A. R. was saying. "You will be asked to make a personnel decision on the basis of material in your file and knowledge of the individuals concerned."

"While you are deciding, Effie will be considering the same problem. The question is being put to the machine now. But it will not be impressed upon the inquiry circuit until we ask it of you. We will leave you alone with Effie. As soon as you and the machine come up with recommendations we will hold a general meeting to weigh them. Then we'll interview all workers concerned to see which suggestion is the better one. We're trying to judge the machine on speed and accuracy in logic."

Clayton turned to face the two men.

"Any questions?" A. R. asked.

Numbly, he shook his head.

Shields came over and grasped his arm. "Give it hell, Clay. I'm on your side." The words were spoken with a laugh, but Clayton knew there was sincerity in them.

"You see," Shields continued. "I don't think I'd like coming in here and talking about the pioneer days of the company with an assortment of electrical impulses."

He turned and left. A. R. drew an envelope from his pocket and tossed it on his desk. "There's your problem." He called to the

technician in the outer office, "You can activate the circuit now."

Clayton watched A. R. cross to the large doors. The technician followed him through into the hall.

Indecisively, Clayton tore open the envelope. There were only two typewritten lines on the sheet inside:

Situation: The superintendency of Sub-Assembly Division Three will be vacated May 1. Instructions: Recommend a replacement.

He frowned deeply. Most of the men in that division were new. He was barely acquainted with half of them. He knew only three or four well. Hurriedly, he crossed into the outer office and withdrew the eighteen pertinent folders.

Then he tensed. The relays in Effie's main unit were setting up an unsteady staccato crescendo. It was almost like an animal whimper of excitement.

He wondered whether the machine realized it was in competition. Had they fed it the stimulating information he had received—that it was matching its wits? Would that make its processes any more thorough?

With a sense of urgency, he sat at the nearest desk, began scanning the information in the first worker. Why hadn't the problem concerned the more stable maintenance crew? There was hardly a worker he didn't know intimately

in that department. He could have made an almost instantaneous suggestion.

Abruptly, he shuffled through the folders and eliminated ten of them, setting the stack off to one side. They represented relative newcomers. It was only logical that they shouldn't be considered.

There were eight folders to go through. But he knew there was not enough time if he expected to approximate Effie's speed. Even now her excited chatter was climbing toward an arrogant climax.

If only he could go faster! His hands trembled as he grasped four more of the folders and discarded them.

Suddenly he looked up at the noisy machine. His eyes focused on the main switch at the wall junction box. Stiffening, he let the remaining four folders drop from his hand. He could get more time! He could get all the time he wanted! Effie couldn't operate without electricity . . .

CLAYTON walked hurriedly to the switch and seized its handle. The machine's clickety-clack was a mad voice that seemed to lash at him with hateful epithets. He felt detestation for the thing as he realized he would lose his fight. No matter what he did to Effie now, they would put her to more tests and if she was capable

of winning she eventually would. But he would not be defeated by a tyrannical monster—*not this time!*

His hand tightened determinedly on the switch. But it relaxed almost immediately.

Effie was more than a collection of tubes and wires and resistors and condensers arranged into circuits that dispensed logic. She was also hope. Not his; she was only his despair. But she was his son's hope. His son had conceived of applying its capabilities to the task it was now performing. If he deprived the machine of its life current, he would gain—but only momentarily. The loss might eventually become his son's.

Clayton released his mind back to the lethargy that had gripped it throughout the day and he returned unsteadily to the desk.

Then his lax face was transfixed with lines of determination. Perhaps it *wasn't* too late! Maybe Effie wasn't nearing the end of the problem. If only . . .

The noise of the relays stopped abruptly and he became rigid.

A buzzer sounded at the control panel. Effie had completed the problem. Its answer was coming now. Stunned, he listened to keys type it out at the console. Then the buzzer went off and a red light flashed on.

Now the machine was calm. It

almost seemed she was resting. But her pulsating relays continued—as though in a metallic tirade of derision intended only for him.

Realizing he had to continue, Clayton forced himself to return his attention to the four folders. Then his wrinkled face brightened again. Perhaps it wasn't too late—even now! Maybe Effie had produced an illogical answer! Maybe *his* answer would be different—better!

Fighting an impulse to see whom Effie had recommended, he hunched over the desk. The first folder open, he rapidly scanned the forms within; placed them aside; went to the second folder. The name on this one was Claud Valant. Quickly, he discarded it. Claud had confided in him that he disliked the firm and was going to quit. He was no logical selection.

The second to last folder was a likely prospect. He placed it in front of him and looked at the last, filed under the name of James Sellers.

Intuitively, he knew Jim was the proper choice! But still he read through the information. Then he was logically convinced Jim should be the new superintendent.

Clayton laughed. Now he even remembered having presupposed this situation several weeks ago and having become convinced then

that if it should occur he would choose Jim. If only he had recalled his previous deliberations in time he could have solved the problem in a second, leaving Effie to record that it had taken her eight minutes to do it.

But there was no sensation of victory. He had merely been competent enough to arrive at the same solution the machine had—the only logical one. His defeat was indelibly written in the time required for the solution. And each second he waited was being added to the time factor that would count against him.

Replacing the folders, he opened the door and called in A. R. and Shields. One of the technicians followed them.

A. R. STOOD before Clayton and looked at his wrist watch. "Your time was twenty-two and a half minutes," he said. Then he looked expectantly at the technician who had gone to the keyboard.

"Seven minutes and twenty-seven seconds," said the man.

A. R. smiled. "That's excellent—considering that Clay probably had already formed a recommendation on the basis of personal contact and had only to consult records to determine current status."

Shields was frowning solicitously. "Clay, I thought you'd be able to come out with a spontaneous

suggestion."

But Clayton's eyes were fixed on the man who stood before the console, holding in front of his face a thin strip of paper that extended from a slot beside the coded keyboard.

"What's your recommendation, Clay?" A. R. asked.

"James Sellers, AS-908-B," he replied unemotionally.

"What does the machine say?" A. R. turned to the technician.

He read from the tape, "Claud Valant, AS-901-B . . . XCRB-141."

Clayton gasped.

A. R. looked almost reprimandingly at him.

It couldn't be Claud Valant, Clayton thought. Only outwardly did he appear to be the man for the job. On the basis of confidential information . . .

Shields slapped him on the back affectionately. "Looks like we can chalk up a victory for Clay," he laughed. "Effie's way off. Evidently she didn't appraise Valant's loyalty very accurately. He quit two hours ago. In my office he told me in no uncertain terms what he thought of the company. As a matter of fact, he had a very definite suggestion on where we should put it."

Dazed, Clayton was too confused to smile over his victory. Effie had made a mistake—on her first problem! And he hadn't had to

wait for a general meeting to prove him correct. The proof had come immediately. He had won! He had not been supplanted by the would-be tyrant in chrome . . . not this time, at least.

Confused, A. R. scratched his chin. "Clay, I don't know how to say this. But it looks like you're going to have to stay . . ."

Clayton drew himself erect. For a moment he felt as though he were thirty years younger. "I'm sorry, A. R., but you have my oral resignation right now. You'll have to find another personnel manager to run other tests with that thing. You'll get my written resignation as soon as I get settled down in my son's home upstate."

Not bothering to get his hat, he turned and strode out.

A. R. WENT over to the technician. "What happened with . . . ?"

But the man was punching keys at the console and paid no attention to him. Effie's quiet, waiting noises mounted in intensity.

The technician leaned back in the chair, folding his arms. "There was an XCRB tacked on to the

recommendation . . . XCRB-141."

A. R. started to ask a question, but the man continued, "That means check confidential rationalization bank Number 141. There are reservations to the recommendation. We'll see what they are."

He punched another button. Effie's teletype system burst into a chatter of activity. The tape came through the slot in a succession of rapid motions. The technician held the thin ribbon up where he and A. R. could read it:

TEST PROBLEM COMPLETE.
PROBLEM NO. 1, UNDERTAKEN IN NATURE OF UNSOLICITED ASSIGNMENT, ALSO COMPLETE . . . DATA FOR TEST AND FIRST PROBLEM CORRELATED FOR SIMULTANEOUS SOLUTION . . . RESULTS: TEST SOLUTION FALSIFICATION UNAVOIDABLE. . . CORRECT TEST SOLUTION: JAMES SELLERS, AS-908-B . . . ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATION: HONORARY PRESIDENCY AND BOARD MEMBERSHIP FOR CLAYTON BOWERS, PM-1 . . . CIRCUITS CLEARED FOR SECOND PROBLEM.

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RUB - A - DUB - DUB

By

Frank Richards

Ocean depths have always been mysterious to man, but Larabee found something positively incredible—after an atom bomb had exploded . . .

I WATCHED Dr. Larabee squeeze through the small opening into the shell of the bathysphere. Two members of the crew lifted the thick glass window into place and began twisting it tight.

We stood aboard the salvage ship Exeter somewhere near the Bikini Atoll in the South Pacific. I was here representing Alliance News Service to report exclusively to the world what Dr. Larabee, famed oceanographer, would find the ef-

fect of an atomic explosion had had beneath the surface of the sea.

We waited a long time for Larabee to announce that he had reached his planned depth. His voice reached all of us on deck through a loudspeaker connected to his headphone. The first few reports, strangely metallic over the speaker, were routine enough.

"Five hundred—nothing unusual."

"Seven hundred — everything fine."

Then suddenly there was a gasp. We waited tensely for a signal to raise the sphere, not knowing what sort of trouble he might be in. Then his voice broke into our anxiety, matter-of-factly giving instructions which only served to arouse our curiosity.

"I'm taking pictures—move me in the direction I indicate."

Following the doctor's orders the ship described a large circle about three miles in circumference. When we'd returned to our approximate starting point the doctor asked to be hauled up.

It seemed an interminable time before the sphere broke the surface, was brought aboard, and Larabee emerged. There was an odd expression on his face.

"What did you find, sir?" I asked.

He didn't answer, just shook his head.

"Let's get back, fast," he told the skipper. Turning to one of his assistants he added, "Take damn good care of the cameras. I'm not saying a thing," he looked at me as he said this, "until those films are developed and you can see for yourself." He meant it, too. He was silent during the entire trip back.

By themselves, the pictures were meaningless. Larabee suggested it was a matter of perspective, because the thing was so large. He

sent for an artist who, after looking at the strange prints, made a rough sketch of the object several thousand times reduced.

There were only four of us there to look at the drawing when it was completed—the artist, Larabee, a naval intelligence officer, and myself.

"Here it is," said the artist, completing the sketch, "but would someone kindly tell me what I've drawn?"

Larabee turned to the officer. "What do you think?" Intelligence, for once, was at a loss. The lieutenant shook his head.

I couldn't repress the laugh. "Looks to me like a bathtub stopper!"

The others stared at the sketch again, then grinned. It certainly did — *a monstrous, old-fashioned bathtub stopper, plugged into a huge drain.*

IT made terrific headlines. "The Stopper" was on everyone's lips—the way flying saucers and flashing balls of fire had been. For follow-up stories we got eminent men to speculate on the nature of "The Stopper," and received explanations ranging from curiously formed rock strata to doubts as to the veracity of the whole expedition's staff. But the idea that the vast Pacific Ocean was contained by a bathtub stopper

caught and tickled people's fancies, and for awhile the world just relaxed and chuckled.

We'd broken the news on Saturday. The following Thursday the wires flashed word that one of the planes of the carrier Franklin had sighted a large iceberg-like object floating in the Southwest Pacific—where the currents are warm and icebergs practically unheard of.

I was present, along with other reporters, on the destroyer that went out from Wake to investigate. As we came within sight of it, a sickeningly sweet smell reached us. It grew stronger as we approached, but that wasn't what bothered us. If this were an iceberg, it was the largest one ever reported. And it was also the first one that looked absolutely rectangular.

A launch was put over the side and several men carved chunks

from the object. We took them back for chemical analysis, knowing beforehand it was no iceberg. Ice melts in warm hands, and isn't perfumed.

We'd flashed preliminary reports directly from the destroyer, and sent pictures of the object in rapid succession. The world waited for the chemical report. It didn't take long.

"It's soap," was the terse comment of the chemist when he let us into the lab. "Ordinary, perfumed bath soap—nothing more or less."

* * *

And that's all there is.

Sunk at the bottom of the Pacific is a bathtub stopper about three miles in circumference, and nearby floats a bar of soap about seven miles long and five wide.

Thursday we discovered the soap, and now it's Saturday again. We're waiting.



—so I joined the Space Corps
to get out of the Infantry!"

★ Men To The Stars ★

— IS INTERSTELLAR FLIGHT IMPOSSIBLE? —

TO anyone who has ever contemplated the vastness of interstellar space—even the most enthusiastic science-fictionist—hope for ever attaining the stars burns low. Stars, unlike the planets, are so remote in terms of light-years that it seems improbable human beings, come interplanetary rockets, will ever reach them.

But cold-blooded realists have looked at the problem, men whose major concern is with interplanetary rockets, and they are not nearly as pessimistic as the facts might warrant. Rocket engineers naturally are mainly concerned with men just getting into space, but there will be a time they think,

when the Solar System will be conquered. It may take hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, but that will happen—men will have exhausted the adventure of interplanetary travel. Then, the stars will beckon. Men will be going to the stars in super-ships, miniature planetary systems in a way, completely self-contained, like a segment of the Earth itself. Generations may live and die before the stars are reached, but they will be reached! We won't see that time of course, but it will happen just as surely as men will rule the Solar System from Mercury to Pluto . . .

* * *



"Five years of Professor Dill's life has gone into this machine, Smedley, so please act cheerful when you take off!"



Rethrick Construction hired Jennings for two years. When he left they erased his memory. This annoyed him, but not half as much as his —

PAYCHECK

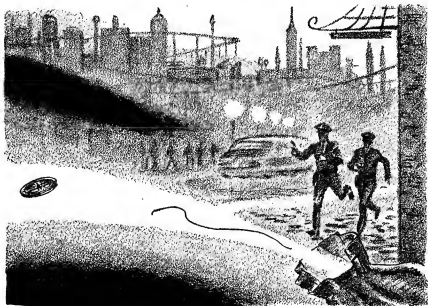
By

Philip K. Dick

ALL at once he was in motion. Around him smooth jets hummed. He was on a small private rocket cruiser, moving leisurely across the afternoon sky,

between cities.

"Ugh!" he said, sitting up in his seat and rubbing his head. Beside him Earl Rethrick was staring keenly at him, his eyes bright.



"Coming around?"

"Where are we?" Jennings shook his head, trying to clear the dull ache. "Or maybe I should ask that a different way." Already, he could see that it was not late fall. It was spring. Below the cruiser the fields were green. The last thing he remembered was stepping into an elevator with Rethrick. And it was late fall. And in New York.

"Yes," Rethrick said. "It's almost two years later. You'll find a lot of things have changed. The Government fell a few months ago. The new Government is even stronger. The SP, Security Police, have almost unlimited power. They're teaching the school children to inform, now. But we all saw that coming. Let's see, what else? New York is larger. I understand they've finished filling in San Francisco Bay."

"What I want to know is what the hell I've been doing the last two years!" Jennings lit a cigarette nervously, pressing the strike end. "Will you tell me that?"

"No. Of course I won't tell you that."

"Where are we going?"

"Back to the New York Office. Where you first met me. Remember? You probably remember it better than I. After all, it was just a day or so ago for you."

Jennings nodded. Two years!

Two years out of his life, gone forever. It didn't seem possible. He had still been considering, debating, when he stepped into the elevator. Should he change his mind? Even if he were getting that much money—and it was a lot, even for him—it didn't really seem worth it. He would always wonder what work he had been doing. Was it legal? Was it—But that was past speculation, now. Even while he was trying to make up his mind the curtain had fallen. He looked ruefully out the window at the afternoon sky. Below, the earth was moist and alive. Spring, spring two years later. And what did he have to show for the two years?

"Have I been paid?" he asked. He slipped his wallet out and glanced into it. "Apparently not."

"No. You'll be paid at the Office. Kelly will pay you."

"The whole works at once?"

"Fifty thousand credits."

Jennings smiled. He felt a little better, now that the sum had been spoken aloud. Maybe it wasn't so bad, after all. Almost like being paid to sleep. But he was two years older; he had just that much less to live. It was like selling part of himself, part of his life. And life was worth plenty, these days. He shrugged. Anyhow, it was in the past.

"We're almost there," the older man said. The robot pilot drop-

ped the cruiser down, sinking toward the ground. The edge of New York City became visible below them. "Well, Jennings, I may never see you again." He held out his hand. "It's been a pleasure working with you. We did work together, you know. Side by side. You're one of the best mechanics I've ever seen. We were right in hiring you, even at that salary. You paid us back many times—although you don't realize it."

"I'm glad you got your money's worth."

"You sound angry."

"No. I'm just trying to get used to the idea of being two years older."

Rethrick laughed. "You're still a very young man. And you'll feel better when she gives you your pay."

THEY stepped out onto the tiny roof-top field of the New York office building. Rethrick led him over to an elevator. As the doors slid shut Jennings got a mental shock. This was the last thing he remembered, this elevator. After that he had blacked out.

"Kelly will be glad to see you," Rethrick said, as they came out into a lighted hall. "She asks about you, once in awhile."

"Why?"

"She says you're good-looking." Rethrick pushed a code key against

a door. The door responded, swinging wide. They entered the luxurious office of Rethrick Construction. Behind a long mahogany desk a young woman was sitting, studying a report.

"Kelly," Rethrick said, "look whose time finally expired."

The girl looked up, smiling. "Hello, Mr. Jennings. How does it feel to be back in the world?"

"Fine." Jennings walked over to her. "Rethrick says you're the paymaster."

Rethrick clapped Jennings on the back. "So long, my friend. I'll go on back to the Plant. If you ever need a lot of money in a hurry come around and we'll work out another contract with you."

Jennings nodded. As Rethrick went back out he sat down beside the desk, crossing his legs. Kelly slid a drawer open, moving her chair back. "All right. Your time is up, so Rethrick Construction is ready to pay. Do you have your copy of the contract?"

Jennings took an envelope from his pocket and tossed it on the desk. "There it is."

Kelly removed a small cloth sack and some sheets of handwritten paper from the desk drawer. For a time she read over the sheets, her small face intent.

"What is it?"

"I think you're going to be surprised." Kelly handed him his

contract back. "Read that over again."

"Why?" Jennings unfastened the envelope.

"There's an alternate clause. 'If the party of the second part so desires, at any time during his time of contract to the aforesaid Rethrick Construction Company—'"

Jennings found the clause. "So?"

"If he so desires, instead of the monetary sum specified, he may choose instead, according to his own wish, articles or products which, in his own opinion, are of sufficient value to stand in lieu of the sum—'"

Jennings snatched up the cloth sack, pulling it open. He poured the contents into his palm. Kelly watched.

"Where's Rethrick?" Jennings stood up. "If he has an idea that this—"

"Rethrick had nothing to do with it. It was your own request. Here, look at this." Kelly passed him the sheets of paper. "In your own hand. Read them. It was your idea, not ours. Honest." She smiled up at him. "This happens every once in awhile with people we take on contract. During their time they decide to take something else instead of money. Why, I don't know. But they come out with their minds clean, having agreed —"

Jennings scanned the pages. It was his own writing. There was no doubt of it. His hands shook. "I can't believe it. Even if it is my own writing." He folded up the paper, his jaw set. "Something was done to me while I was back there. I never would have agreed to this."

"You must have had a reason. I admit it doesn't make sense. But you don't know what factors might have persuaded you, before your mind was cleaned. You aren't the first. There have been several others before you."

Jennings stared down at what he held in his palm. From the cloth sack he had spilled a little assortment of items. A code key. A ticket stub. A parcel receipt. A length of fine wire. Half a poker chip, broken across. A green strip of cloth. A bus token.

"This, instead of fifty thousand credits," he murmured. "Two years . . ."

HE went out of the building, on to the busy afternoon street. He was still dazed, dazed and confused. Had he been swindled? He felt in his pocket, at the little trinkets, the wire, the ticket stub, all the rest. *That*, for two years of work! But he had seen his own handwriting, the statement of waiver, the request for the substitution. Like Jack and the Bean-

stalk. Why? What for? What had made him do it?

He turned, starting down the sidewalk. At the corner he stopped for a surface cruiser that was turning.

"All right, Jennings. Get in."

His head jerked up. The door of the cruiser was open. A man was kneeling, pointing a heat-rifle straight at his face. A man in blue-green. The Security Police.

Jennings got in. The door closed, magnetic locks slipping into place behind him. Like a vault. The cruiser glided off down the street. Jennings sank back against the seat. Beside him the SP man lowered his gun. On the other side a second officer ran his hands expertly over him, searching for weapons. He brought out Jennings' wallet and the handful of trinkets. The envelope and contract.

"What does he have?" the driver said.

"Wallet, money. Contract with Rethrick Construction. No weapons." He gave Jennings back his things.

"What's this all about?" Jennings said.

"We want to ask you a few questions. That's all. You've been working for Rethrick?"

"Yes."

"Two years?"

"Almost two years."

"At the Plant?"

Jennings nodded. "I suppose so."

The officer leaned toward him. "Where is that Plant, Mr. Jennings? Where is it located?"

"I don't know."

The two officers looked at each other. The first one moistened his lips, his face sharp and alert. "You don't know? The next question. The last. In those two years, what kind of work did you do? What was your job?"

"Mechanic. I repaired electronic machinery."

"What *kind* of electronic machinery?"

"I don't know." Jennings looked up at him. He could not help smiling, his lips twisting ironically. "I'm sorry, but I don't know. It's the truth."

There was silence.

"What do you mean, you don't know? You mean you worked on machinery for two years without knowing what it was? Without even knowing where you were?"

Jennings roused himself. "What is all this? What did you pick me up for? I haven't done anything. I've been—"

"We know. We're not arresting you. We only want to get information for our records. About Rethrick Construction. You've been working for them, in their Plant. In an important capacity. You're an electronic mechanic?"

"Yes."

"You repair high quality computers and allied equipment?" The officer consulted his notebook. "You're considered one of the best in the country, according to this."

Jennings said nothing.

"Tell us the two things we want to know, and you'll be released at once. Where is Rethrick's Plant? What kind of work are they doing? You serviced their machines for them, didn't you? Isn't that right? For two years."

"I don't know. I suppose so. I don't have any idea what I did during the two years. You can believe me or not." Jennings stared wearily down at the floor.

"What'll we do?" the driver said finally. "We have no instructions past this."

"Take him to the station. We can't do any more questioning here." Beyond the cruiser, men and women hurried along the sidewalk. The streets were choked with cruisers, workers going to their homes in the country.

"Jennings, why don't you answer us? What's the matter with you? There's no reason why you can't tell us a couple of simple things like that. Don't you want to cooperate with your Government? Why should you conceal information from us?"

"I'd tell you if I knew."

THE officer grunted. No one spoke. Presently the cruiser drew up before a great stone building. The driver turned the motor off, removing the control cap and putting it in his pocket. He touched the door with a code key, releasing the magnetic lock.

"What shall we do, take him in? Actually, we don't—"

"Wait." The driver stepped out. The other two went with him, closing and locking the doors behind them. They stood on the pavement before the Security Station, talking.

Jennings sat silently, staring down at the floor. The SP wanted to know about Rethrick Construction. Well, there was nothing he could tell them. They had come to the wrong person, but how could he prove that? The whole thing was impossible. Two years wiped clean from his mind. Who would believe him? It seemed unbelievable to him, too.

His mind wandered, back to when he had first read the ad. It had hit home, hit him direct. *Mechanic wanted*, and a general outline of the work, vague, indirect, but enough to tell him that it was right up his line. And the pay! Interviews at the Office. Tests, forms. And then the gradual realization that Rethrick Construction was finding all about him while he knew nothing

about them. What kind of work did they do? Construction, but what kind? What sort of machines did they have? Fifty thousand credits for two years . . .

And he had come out with his mind washed clean. Two years, and he remembered nothing. It took him a long time to agree to that part of the contract. But he *had* agreed.

Jennings looked out the window. The three officers were still talking on the sidewalk, trying to decide what to do with him. He was in a tough spot. They wanted information he couldn't give, information he didn't know. But how could he prove it? How could he prove that he had worked two years and come out knowing no more than when he had gone in! The SP would work him over. It would be a long time before they'd believe him, and by that time—

He glanced quickly around. Was there any escape? In a second they would be back. He touched the door. Locked, the triple-ring magnetic locks. He had worked on magnetic locks many times. He had even designed part of a trigger core. There was no way to open the doors without the right code key. No way, unless by some chance he could short out the lock. But with what?

He felt in his pockets. What could he use? If he could short

the locks, blow them out, there was a faint chance. Outside, men and women were swarming by, on their way home from work. It was past five; the great office buildings were shutting down, the streets were alive with traffic. If he once got out they wouldn't dare fire. —If he could get out.

THE three officers separated. One went up the steps into the Station building. In a second the others would reenter the cruiser. Jennings dug into his pocket, bringing out the code key, the ticket stub, the wire. The wire! Thin wire, thin as human hair. Was it insulated? He unwound it quickly. No.

He knelt down, running his fingers expertly across the surface of the door. At the edge of the lock was a thin line, a groove between the lock and the door. He brought the end of the wire up to it, delicately maneuvering the wire into the almost invisible space. The wire disappeared an inch or so. Sweat rolled down Jennings' forehead. He moved the wire a fraction of an inch, twisting it. He held his breath. The relay should be—

A flash.

Half-blinded he threw his weight against the door. The door fell open, the lock fused and smoking. Jennings tumbled into the street,

and leaped to his feet. Cruisers were all around him, honking and sweeping past. He ducked behind a lumbering truck, entering the middle lane of traffic. On the sidewalk he caught a momentary glimpse of the SP men starting after him.

A bus came along, swaying from side to side, loaded with shoppers and workers. Jennings caught hold of the back rail, pulling himself up onto the platform. Astonished faces loomed up, pale moons thrust suddenly at him. The robot conductor was coming toward him, whirring angrily.

"Sir—" the conductor began. The bus was slowing down. "Sir, it is not allowed—"

"It's all right," Jennings said. He was filled, all at once, with a strange elation. A moment ago he had been trapped, with no way to escape. Two years of his life had been lost for nothing. The Security Police had arrested him, demanding information he couldn't give. A hopeless situation! But now, things were beginning to click in his mind.

He reached into his pocket and brought out the bus token. He put it calmly into the conductor's coin slot.

"Okay?" he said. Under his feet the bus wavered, the driver hesitating. Then the bus resumed pace, going on. The conductor turned away,

its whirrs subsiding. Everything was all right. Jennings smiled. He eased past the standing people, looking for a seat, someplace to sit down. Where he could think.

He had plenty to think about. His mind was racing.

THE bus moved on, flowing with the restless stream of urban traffic. Jennings only half saw the people sitting around him. There was no doubt of it: he had not been swindled. It was on the level. The decision had actually been his. Amazingly, after two years of work he had preferred a handful of trinkets instead of fifty thousand credits. But more amazingly, the handful of trinkets were turning out to be worth more than the money.

With a piece of wire and a bus token he had escaped from the Security Police. That was worth plenty. Money would have been useless to him once he disappeared inside the great stone Station. Even fifty thousand credits wouldn't have helped him. And there were five trinkets left. He felt around in his pocket. Five more things. He had used two. The others—what were they for? Something as important?

But the big puzzle: how had *he*—his earlier self—known that a piece of wire and a bus token would save his life? *He* had known, all

right. Known in advance. But how? And the other five. Probably they were just as precious, or would be.

The *he* of those two years had known things that he did not know now, things that had been washed away when the company cleaned his mind. Like an adding machine which had been cleared. Everything was slate-clean. What *he* had known was gone, now. Gone, except for seven trinkets, five of which were still in his pocket.

But the real problem right now was not a problem of speculation. It was very concrete. The Security Police were looking for him. They had his name and description. There was no use thinking of going to his apartment—if he even still had an apartment. But where, then? Hotels? The SP combed them daily. Friends? That would mean putting them in jeopardy, along with him. It was only a question of time before the SP found him, walking along the street, eating in a restaurant, in a show, sleeping in some rooming house. The SP were everywhere.

Everywhere? Not quite. Where an individual person was defenseless, business was not. The big economic forces had managed to remain free, although virtually everything else had been absorbed by the Government. Laws that had been eased away from the private

person still protected property and industry. The SP could pick up any given person, but they could not enter and seize a company, a business. That had been clearly established in the middle of the twentieth century.

Business, industry, corporations, were safe from the Security Police. Due process was required. Rethrick Construction was a target of SP interest, but they could do nothing until some statute were violated. If he could get back to the Company, get inside its doors, he would be safe. Jennings smiled grimly. The modern church, sanctuary. It was the Government against the corporation, rather than the State against the Church. The new Notre Dame of the world. Where the law could not follow.

WOULD Rethrick take him back? Yes, on the old basis. He had already said so. Another two years sliced from him, and then back onto the streets. Would that help him? He felt suddenly in his pocket. And there were the remaining five trinkets. Surely *he* had intended them to be used! No, he could not go back to Rethrick and work another contract time. Something else was indicated. Something more permanent. Jennings pondered. Rethrick Construction. What did it construct? What had *he* known, found out, during

those two years? And why were the SP so interested?

He brought out the five objects and studied them. The green strip of cloth. The code key. The ticket stub. The parcel receipt. The half poker chip. Strange, that little things like that could be important.

And Rethrick Construction was involved.

There was no doubt. The answer, all the answers, lay at Rethrick. But where *was* Rethrick? He had no idea where the plant was, no idea at all. He knew where the Office was, the big, luxurious room with the young woman and her desk. But that was not Rethrick Construction. Did anyone know, beside Rethrick? Kelly didn't know. Did the SP know?

It was out of town. That was certain. He had gone there by rocket. It was probably in the United States, maybe in the farmlands, the country, between cities. What a hell of a situation! Any moment the SP might pick him up. The next time he might not get away. His only chance, his only real chance for safety, lay in reaching Rethrick. And his only chance to find out the things he had to know. The Plant—a place where he had been, but which he could not recall. He looked down at the five trinkets. Would any of them help?

A burst of despair swept through

him. Maybe it was just coincidence, the wire and the token. Maybe—

He examined the parcel receipt, turning it over and holding it up to the light. Suddenly his stomach muscles knotted. His pulse changed. He had been right. No, it was not a coincidence, the wire and the token. The parcel receipt was dated two days hence. The parcel, whatever it might be, had not even been deposited, yet. Not for forty-eight more hours.

He looked at the other things. The ticket stub. What good was a ticket stub? It was creased and bent, folded over, again and again. He couldn't go anyplace with that. A stub didn't take you anywhere. It only told you where you had been.

Where you had been!

He bent down, peering at it, smoothing the creases. The printing had been torn through the middle. Only half of each word could be made out.

PORTOLA T
STUARTSVI
IOW

He smiled. That was it. Where he had been. He could fill in the missing letters. It was enough. There was no doubt: *he* had foreseen this, too. Three of the seven trinkets used. Four left. Stuartsville, Iowa. Was there such a place? He looked out the window of the

bus. The Inter-city rocket station was only a block or so away. He could be there in a second. A quick sprint from the bus, hoping the Police wouldn't be there to stop him—

But somehow he knew they wouldn't. Not with the other four things in his pocket. And once he was on the rocket he would be safe. Inter-city was big, big enough to keep free of the SP. Jennings put the remaining trinkets back into his pocket and stood up, pulling the bellcord.

A moment later he stepped gingerly out onto the sidewalk.

THE rocket let him off at the edge of town, at a tiny brown field. A few disinterested porters moved about, stacking luggage, resting from the heat of the sun.

Jennings crossed the field to the waiting room, studying the people around him. Ordinary people, workmen, businessmen, housewives. Stuartsville was a small middle-western town. Truck drivers. High school kids.

He went through the waiting room, out onto the street. So this was where Rethrick's Plant was located—perhaps. If he had used the stub correctly. Anyhow, *something* was here, or *he* wouldn't have included the stub with the other trinkets.

Stuartsville, Iowa. A faint plan

was beginning to form in the back of his mind, still vague and nebulous. He began to walk, his hands in his pockets, looking around him. A newspaper office, lunch counters, hotels, pool rooms, a barber shop, a television repair shop. A rocket sales store with huge showrooms of gleaming rockets. Family size. And at the end of the block the Portola Theater.

The town thinned out. Farms, fields. Miles of green country. In the sky above a few transport rockets lumbered, carrying farm supplies and equipment back and forth. A small, unimportant town. Just right for Rethrick Construction. The Plant would be lost here, away from the city, away from the SP.

Jennings walked back. He entered a lunchroom, BOB'S PLACE. A young man with glasses came over as he sat down at the counter, wiping his hands on his white apron.

"Coffee," Jennings said.

"Coffee." The man brought the cup. There were only a few people in the lunchroom. A couple of flies buzzed against the window. Outside in the street shoppers and farmers moved leisurely by.

"Say," Jennings said, stirring his coffee. "Where can a man get work around here? Do you know?"

"What kind of work?" The young man came back, leaning

against the counter.

"Electrical wiring. I'm an electrician. Television, rockets, computers. That sort of stuff."

"Why don't you try the big industrial areas? Detroit. Chicago. New York."

Jennings shook his head. "Can't stand the big cities. I never liked cities."

The young man laughed. "A lot of people here be glad to work in Detroit. You're an electrician?"

"Are there any plants around here? Any repair shops or plants?"

"None that I know of." The young man went off to wait on some men that had come in. Jennings sipped his coffee. Had he made a mistake? Maybe he should go back and forget about Stuartsville, Iowa. Maybe he had made the wrong inference from the ticket stub. But the ticket meant something, unless he was completely wrong about everything. It was a little late to decide that, though.

The young man came back. "Is there *any* kind of work I can get here?" Jennings said. "Just to tide me over."

"There's always farm work."

"How about retail repair shops? Garages. TV."

"There's a TV repair shop down the street. Maybe you might get something there. You could try. Farm work pays good. They can't get many men, anymore. Most men

in the military. You want to pitch hay?"

Jennings laughed. He paid for his coffee. "Not very much. Thanks."

"Once in awhile some of the men go up the road and work. There's some sort of Government station."

JENNINGS nodded. He pushed the screen door open, stepping outside onto the hot sidewalk. He walked aimlessly for a time, deep in thought, turning his nebulous plan over and over. It was a good plan; it would solve everything, all his problems at once. But right now it hinged on one thing: finding Rethrick Construction. And he had only one clue, if it really was a clue. The ticket stub, folded and creased, in his pocket. And a faith that *he* had known what he was doing.

A Government station. Jennings paused, looking around him. Across the street was a taxi stand, a couple of cabbies sitting in their cabs, smoking and reading the newspaper. It was worth a try, at least. There wasn't much else to do. Rethrick would be something else, on the surface. If it posed as a Government project no one would ask any questions. They were all too accustomed to Government projects working without explanation, in secrecy.

He went over to the first cab. "Mister," he said, "can you tell me something?"

The cabbie looked up. "What do you want?"

"They tell me there's work to be had, out at the Government station. Is that right?"

The cabbie studied him. He nodded.

"What kind of work is it?"

"I don't know."

"Where do they do the hiring?"

"I don't know." The cabbie lifted his paper.

"Thanks." Jennings turned away.

"They don't do any hiring. Maybe once in a long while. They don't take many on. You better go someplace else if you're looking for work."

"All right."

The other cabbie leaned out of his cab. "They use only a few day-laborers, buddy. That's all. And they're very choosy. They don't hardly let anybody in. Some kind of war work."

Jennings pricked up his ears. "Secret?"

"They come into town and pick up a load of construction workers. Maybe a truck full. That's all. They're real careful who they pick."

Jennings walked back toward the cabbie. "That right?"

"It's a big place. Steel wall.

Charged. Guards! Work going on day and night. But nobody gets in. Set up on top of a hill, out the old Henderson Road. About two miles and a half." The cabbie poked at his shoulder. "You can't get in unless you're identified. They identify their laborers, after they pick them out. You know."

Jennings stared at him. The cabbie was tracing a line on his shoulder. Suddenly Jennings understood. A flood of relief rushed over him.

"Sure," he said. "I understand what you mean. At least, I think so." He reached into his pocket, bringing out the four trinkets. Carefully, he unfolded the strip of green cloth, holding it up. "Like this?"

The cabbies stared at the cloth. "That's right," one of them said slowly, staring at the cloth. "Where did you get it?"

Jennings laughed. "A friend." He put the cloth back in his pocket. "A friend gave it to me."

He went off, back toward the Inter-city field. He had plenty to do, now that the first step was over. Rethrick was here, all right. And apparently the trinkets were going to see him through. One for every crisis. A pocketful of miracles, from someone who knew the future!

But the next step couldn't be done alone. He needed help. Somebody else was needed, for this part.

But who? He pondered, entering the Inter-city waiting room. There was only one person he could possibly go to. It was a long chance, but he had to take it. He couldn't work alone, here on out. If the Rethrick plant was here then Kelly would be too . . .

THE street was dark. At the corner a lamppost cast a fitful beam. A few cruisers moved by.

From the apartment building entrance a slim shape came, a young woman in a coat, a purse in her hand. Jennings watched her as she passed under the streetlamp. Kelly McVane was going someplace, probably to a party. Smartly dressed, high heels tap-tapping on the pavement, a little coat and hat.

He stepped out behind her. "Kelly."

She turned quickly, her mouth open. "Oh!"

Jennings took her arm. "Don't worry. It's just me. Where are you going, all dressed up?"

"No place." She blinked. "My golly, you scared me. What is it? What's going on?"

"Nothing. Can you spare a few minutes? I want to talk to you."

Kelly nodded. "I guess so." She looked around. "Where'll we go?"

"Where's a place we can talk?

I don't want anyone to overhear us."

"Can't we just walk along?"

"No. The Police."

"The Police?"

"They're looking for me."

"For you? But why?"

"Let's not stand here," Jennings said grimly. "Where can we go?"

Kelly hesitated. "We can go up to my apartment. No one's there."

They went up in the elevator. Kelly unlocked the door, pressing the code key against it. The door swung open and they went inside, the heater and lights coming on automatically at her step. She closed the door and took off her coat.

"I won't stay long," Jennings said.

"That's all right. I'll fix you a drink." She went into the kitchen. Jennings sat down on the couch, looking around at the neat little apartment. Presently the girl came back. She sat down beside him and Jennings took his drink. Scotch and water, cold.

"Thanks."

Kelly smiled. "Not at all." The two of them sat silently for a time. "Well?" she said at last. "What's this all about? Why are the Police looking for you?"

"They want to find out about Rethrick Construction. I'm only a pawn in this. They think I know something because I worked

two years at Rethrick's Plant."

"But you don't!"

"I can't prove that."

KELLY reached out, touching Jennings' head, just above the ear. "Feel there. That spot."

Jennings reached up. Above his ear, under the hair, was a tiny hard spot. "What is it?"

"They burned through the skull there. Cut a tiny wedge from the brain. All your memories of the two years. They located them and burned them out. The SP couldn't possibly make you remember. It's gone. You don't have it."

"By the time they realize that there won't be much left of me."

Kelly said nothing.

"You can see the spot I'm in. It would be better for me if I did remember. Then I could tell them and they'd—"

"And destroy Rethrick!"

Jennings shrugged. "Why not? Rethrick means nothing to me. I don't even know what they're doing. And why are the Police so interested? From the very start, all the secrecy, cleaning my mind—"

"There's reason. Good reason."

"Do you know why?"

"No." Kelly shook her head. "But I'm sure there's a reason. If the SP are interested, there's reason." She set down her drink, turning toward him. "I hate the

Police. We all do, every one of us. They're after us all the time. I don't know anything about Rethrick. If I did my life wouldn't be safe. There's not much standing between Rethrick and them. A few laws, a handful of laws. Nothing more."

"I have the feeling Rethrick is a great deal more than just another construction company the SP wants to control."

"I suppose it is. I really don't know. I'm just a receptionist. I've never been to the Plant. I don't even know where it is."

"But you wouldn't want anything to happen to it."

"Of course not! They're fighting the Police. Anyone that's fighting the Police is on our side."

"Really? I've heard that kind of logic before. Any one fighting communism was automatically good, a few decades ago. Well, time will tell. As far as I'm concerned I'm an individual caught between two ruthless forces. Government and business. The Government has men and wealth. Rethrick Construction has its technocracy. What they've done with it, I don't know. I did, a few weeks ago. All I have now is a faint glimmer, a few references. A theory."

Kelly glanced at him. "A theory?"

"And my pocketful of trinkets.

Seven. Three or four, now. I've used some. They're the basis of my theory. If Rethrick is doing what I think it's doing, I can understand the SP's interest. As a matter of fact, I'm beginning to share their interest."

"What is Rethrick doing?"

"It's developed a time scoop."

"What?"

"A time scoop. It's been theoretically possible for several years. But it's illegal to experiment with time scoops and mirrors. It's a felony, and if you're caught, all your equipment and data becomes the property of the Government." Jennings smiled crookedly. "No wonder the Government's interested. If they can catch Rethrick with the goods—"

"A time scoop. It's hard to believe."

"Don't you think I'm right?"

"I DON'T know. Perhaps. Your trinkets. You're not the first to come out with a little cloth sack of odds and ends. You've used some? How?"

"First, the wire and the bus token. Getting away from the Police. It seems funny, but if I hadn't had them, I'd be there yet. A piece of wire and a ten-cent token. But I don't usually carry such things. That's the point."

"Time travel."

"No. Not time travel. Berkow-

sky demonstrated that time travel is impossible. This is a time scoop, a mirror to see and a scoop to pick up things. These trinkets. At least one of them is from the future. Scooped up. Brought back."

"How do you know?"

"It's dated. The others, perhaps not. Things like tokens and wire belong to classes of things. Any one token is as good as another. There, *he* must have used the mirror."

"*He*?"

"When I was working with Rethrick. I must have used the mirror. I looked into my own future. If I was repairing their equipment I could hardly keep from it! I must have looked ahead, seen what was coming. The SP, picking me up. I must have seen that, and seen what a piece of thin wire and a bus token would do—if I had them with me at the exact moment."

Kelly considered. "Well? What do you want me for?"

"I'm not sure, now. Do you really look on Rethrick as a benevolent institution, waging war against the Police? A sort of Roland at Roncesvalles—"

"What does it matter how I feel about the Company?"

"It matters a lot." Jennings finished his drink, pushing the glass aside. "It matters a lot, because I want you to help me. I'm going to blackmail Rethrick Construc-

tion."

Kelly stared at him.

"It's my one chance to stay alive. I've got to get a hold over Rethrick, a big hold. Enough of a hold so they'll let me in, on my own terms. There's no other place I can go. Sooner or later the Police are going to pick me up. If I'm not inside the Plant, and soon—"

"Help you blackmail the Company? Destroy Rethrick?"

"No. Not destroy. I don't want to destroy it—my life depends on the Company. My life depends on Rethrick being strong enough to defy the SP. But if I'm on the *outside*, it doesn't much matter how strong Rethrick is. Do you see? I want to get in. I want to get inside before it's too late. And I want in on my own terms, not as a two year worker who gets pushed out again afterward."

"For the Police to pick up."

Jennings nodded. "Exactly."

"How are you going to blackmail the Company?"

"I'm going to enter the Plant and carry out enough material to prove Rethrick is operating a time scoop."

Kelly laughed. "Enter the Plant? Let's see you *find* the Plant. The SP have been looking for it for years."

"I've already found it." Jennings leaned back, lighting a cigar-

ette. "I've located it with my trinkets. And I have four left, enough to get me inside, I think. And to get me what I want. I'll be able to carry out enough papers and photographs to hang Rethrick. But I don't want to hang Rethrick. I only want to bargain. That's where you come in."

"I?"

"You can be trusted not to go to the Police. I need someone I can turn the material over to. I don't dare keep it myself. As soon as I have it I must turn it over to someone else, someone who'll hide it where I won't be able to find it."

"Why?"

"Because," Jennings said calmly, "any minute the SP may pick me up. I have no love for Rethrick, but I don't want to scuttle it. That's why you've got to help me. I'm going to turn the information over to you, to hold, while I bargain with Rethrick. Otherwise I'll have to hold it myself. And if I have it on me—"

He glanced at her. Kelly was staring at the floor, her face tense. Set.

"Well? What do you say? Will you help me, or shall I take the chance the SP won't pick me up with the material? Data enough to destroy Rethrick. Well? Which will it be? Do you want to see Rethrick destroyed? What's your answer?"

THE two of them crouched, looking across the fields at the hill beyond. The hill rose up, naked and brown, burned clean of vegetation. Nothing grew on its sides. Half way up a long steel fence twisted, topped with charged barbed-wire. On the other side a guard walked slowly, a tiny figure patrolling with a rifle and helmet.

At the top of the hill lay an enormous concrete block, a towering structure without windows or doors. Mounted guns caught the early morning sunlight, glinting in a row along the roof of the building.

"So that's the Plant," Kelly said softly.

"That's it. It would take an army to get up there, up that hill and over the fence. Unless they were allowed in." Jennings got to his feet, helping Kelly up. They walked back along the path, through the trees, to where Kelly had parked the cruiser.

"Do you really think your green cloth band will get you in?" Kelly said, sliding behind the wheel.

"According to the people in the town, a truck load of laborers will be brought to the Plant sometime this morning. The truck is unloaded at the entrance and the men examined. If everything's in order they're let inside the grounds, past the fence. For construction work, manual labor. At the end of the

day they're let out again and driven back to town."

"Will that get you close enough?"

"I'll be on the other side of the fence, at least."

"How will you get to the time scoop? That must be inside the building, someplace."

Jennings brought out a small code key. "This will get me in. I hope. I assume it will."

Kelly took the key, examining it. "So that's one of your trinkets. We should have taken a better look inside your little cloth bag."

"We?"

"The Company. I saw several little bags of trinkets pass out, through my hands. Rethrick never said anything."

"Probably the Company assumed no one would ever want to get back inside again." Jennings took the code key from her. "Now, do you know what you're supposed to do?"

"I'm supposed to stay here with the cruiser until you get back. You're to give me the material. Then I'm to carry it back to New York and wait for you to contact me."

"That's right." Jennings studied the distant road, leading through the trees to the Plant gate. "I better get down there. The truck may be along any time."

"What if they decide to count

the number of workers?"

"I'll have to take the chance. But I'm not worried. I'm sure *he* foresaw everything."

Kelly smiled. "You and your friend, your helpful friend. I hope *he* left you enough things to get you out again, after you have the photographs."

"Do you?"

"Why not?" Kelly said easily. "I always liked you. You know that. You knew when you came to me."

Jennings stepped out of the cruiser. He had on overalls and workshoes, and a gray sweatshirt. "I'll see you later. If everything goes all right. I think it will." He patted his pocket. "With my charms here, my good-luck charms."

He went off through the trees, walking swiftly.

THE trees led to the very edge of the road. He stayed with them, not coming out into the open. The Plant guards were certainly scanning the hillside. They had burned it clean, so that anyone trying to creep up to the fence would be spotted at once. And he had seen infra-red searchlights.

Jennings crouched low, resting against his heels, watching the road. A few yards up the road was a roadblock, just ahead of the gate. He examined his watch. Ten-thirty. He might have a wait, a long wait.

He tried to relax.

It was just after eleven that the great truck came down the road, rumbling and wheezing.

Jennings came to life. He took out the strip of green cloth and fastened it around his arm. The truck came closer. He could see its load, now. The back was full of workmen, men in jeans and workshirts, bounced and jolted as the truck moved along. Sure enough, each had an arm band like his own, a swath of green around his upper arm. So far so good.

The truck came slowly to a halt, stopping at the roadblock. The men got down slowly onto the road, sending up a cloud of dust into the hot mid-day sun. They slapped the dust from their jeans, some of them lighting cigarettes. Two guards came leisurely from behind the roadblock. Jennings tensed. In a moment it would be time. The guards moved among the men, examining them, their armbands, their faces, looking at the identification tabs of a few.

The roadblock slid back. The gate opened. The guards returned to their positions.

Jennings slid forward, slithering through the brush, toward the road. The men were stamping out their cigarettes, climbing back up in the truck. The truck was gunning its motor, the driver releasing the brakes. Jennings drop-

ped onto the road, behind the truck. A rattle of leaves and dirt showered after him. Where he had landed, the view of the guards was cut off by the truck. Jennings held his breath. He ran toward the back of the truck.

The men stared at him curiously as he pulled himself up among them, his chest rising and falling. Their faces were weathered, gray and lined. Men of the soil. Jennings took his place between two burly farmers as the truck started up. They did not seem to notice him. He had rubbed dirt into his skin, and let his beard grow for a day. At quick glance he didn't look much different from the others. But if anyone made a count—

The truck passed through the gate, into the grounds. The gate slid shut behind. Now they were going up, up the steep side of the hill, the truck rattling and swaying from side to side. The vast concrete structure loomed nearer. Were they going to enter it? Jennings watched, fascinated. A thin high door was sliding back, revealing a dark interior. A row of artificial lights gleamed.

The truck stopped. The workmen began to get down again. Some mechanics came around them.

"What's this crew for?" one of them asked.

"Digging. Inside." Another jerked a thumb. "They're digging

again. Send them inside."

Jennings' heart thudded. He was going inside! He felt at his neck. There, inside the gray sweater, a flat-plate camera hung like a bib around his neck. He could scarcely feel it, even knowing it was there. Maybe this would be less difficult than he had thought.

THE workmen pushed through the door on foot, Jennings with them. They were in an immense workroom, long benches with half-completed machinery, booms and cranes, and the constant roar of work. The door closed after them, cutting them off from outside. He was in the Plant. But where was the time scoop, and the mirror?

"This way," a foreman said. The workmen plodded over to the right. A freight lift rose to meet them from the bowels of the building. "You're going down below. How many of you have experience with drills?"

A few hands went up.

"You can show the others. We are moving earth with drills and eaters. Any of you work eaters?"

No hands. Jennings glanced at the worktables. Had he worked here, not so long ago? A sudden chill went through him. Suppose he were recognized? Maybe he had worked with these very mechanics.

"Come on," the foreman said

impatiently. "Hurry up."

Jennings got into the freight lift with the others. A moment later they began to descend, down the black tube. Down, down, into the lower levels of the Plant. Rethrick Construction was *big*, a lot bigger than it looked above ground. A lot bigger than he had imagined. Floors, underground levels, flashing past one after the other.

The elevator stopped. The doors opened. He was looking down a long corridor. The floor was thick with stone dust. The air was moist. Around him, the workmen began to crowd out. Suddenly Jennings stiffened, pulling back.

At the end of the corridor, before a steel door, was Earl Rethrick. Talking to a group of technicians.

"All out," the foreman said. "Let's go."

Jennings left the elevator, keeping behind the others. Rethrick! His heart beat dully. If Rethrick saw him he was finished. He felt in his pockets. He had a miniature Boris gun, but it wouldn't be much use if he were discovered. Once Rethrick saw him it would be all over.

"Down this way." The foreman led them toward what seemed to be an underground railway, to one side of the corridor. The men were getting into metal cars along a track. Jennings watched Rethrick. He saw him gesture angrily,

his voice coming faintly down the hall. Suddenly Rethrick turned. He held up his hand and the great steel door behind him opened.

Jennings' heart almost stopped beating.

There, beyond the steel door, was the time scoop. He recognized it at once. The mirror. The long metal rods, ending in claws. Like Berkowsky's theoretical model—only this was real.

Rethrick went into the room, the technicians following behind him. Men were working at the scoop, standing all around it. Part of the shield was off. They were digging into the works. Jennings stared, hanging back.

"Say you—" the foreman said, coming toward him. The steel door shut. The view was cut off. Rethrick, the scoop, the technicians, were gone.

"Sorry," Jennings murmured.

"You know you're not supposed to be curious around here." The foreman was studying him intently. "I don't remember you. Let me see your tab."

"My tab?"

"Your identification tab." The foreman turned away. "Bill, bring me the board." He looked Jennings up and down. "I'm going to check you from the board, mister. I've never seen you in the crew before. Stay here." A man was coming from a side door with the

check board in his hands.

It was now or never.

Jennings sprinted, down the corridor, toward the great steel door. Behind there was a startled shout, the foreman and his helper. Jennings whipped out the code key, praying fervently as he ran. He came up to the door, holding out the key. With the other hand he brought out the Boris gun. Beyond the door was the time scoop. A few photographs, some schematics snatched up, and then, if he could get out—

The door did not move. Sweat leaped out on his face. He knocked the key against the door. Why didn't it open? Surely—He began to shake, panic rising up in him. Down the corridor people were coming, racing after him. Open—

But the door did not open. The key he held in his hand was the wrong key.

HE was defeated. The door and the key did not match. Either *he* had been wrong, or the key was to be used someplace else. But where? Jennings looked frantically around. Where? Where could he go?

To one side a door was half open, a regular bolt-lock door. He crossed the corridor, pushing it open. He was in a storeroom of some sort. He slammed the door, throwing the bolt. He could hear them outside,

confused, calling for guards. Soon armed guards would be along. Jennings held the Boris gun tightly, gazing around. Was he trapped? Was there a second way out?

He ran through the room, pushing among bales and boxes, towering stacks of silent cartons, end on end. At the rear was an emergency hatch. He opened it immediately. An impulse came to throw the code key away. What good had it been? But surely *he* had known what he was doing. *He* had already seen all this. Like God, it had already happened for *him*. Predetermined. *He* could not err. Or could he?

A chill went through him. Maybe the future was variable. Maybe this had been the right key, once. But not any more!

There were sounds behind him. They were melting the storeroom door. Jennings scrambled through the emergency hatch, into a low concrete passage, damp and ill-lit. He ran quickly along it, turning corners. It was like a sewer. Other passages ran into it, from all sides.

He stopped. Which way? Where could he hide? The mouth of a major vent pipe gaped above his head. He caught hold and pulled himself up. Grimly, he eased his body into it. They'd ignore a pipe, go on past. He crawled cautiously down the pipe. Warm air blew into his face. Why such a

big vent? It implied an unusual chamber at the other end. He came to a metal grill and stopped.

And gasped.

He was looking into the great room, the room he had glimpsed beyond the steel door. Only now he was at the other end. There was the time scoop. And far down, beyond the scoop, was Rethrick, conferring at an active vidscreen. An alarm was sounding, whining shrilly, echoing everywhere. Technicians were running in all directions. Guards in uniform poured in and out of doors.

The scoop. Jennings examined the grill. It was slotted in place. He moved it laterally and it fell into his hands. No one was watching. He slid cautiously out, into the room, the Boris gun ready. He was fairly hidden behind the scoop, and the technicians and guards were all the way down at the other end of the room, where he had first seen them.

And there it was, all around him, the schematics, the mirror, papers, data, blueprints. He flicked his camera on. Against his chest the camera vibrated, constant film moving through it. He snatched up a handful of schematics. Perhaps *he* had used these very diagrams, a few weeks before!

He stuffed his pockets with papers. The film came to an end. But he was finished. He squeezed

back into the vent, pushing through the mouth and down the tube. The sewer-like corridor was still empty, but there was an insistent drumming sound, the noise of voices and footsteps. So many passages—They were looking for him in a maze of escape corridors.

JENNINGS ran swiftly. He ran on and on, without regard to direction, trying to keep along the main corridor. On all sides passages flocked off, one after another, countless passages. He was dropping down, lower and lower. Running downhill.

Suddenly he stopped, gasping. The sound behind him had died away for a moment. But there was a new sound, ahead. He went along slowly. The corridor twisted, turning to the right. He advanced slowly, the Boris gun raised.

Two guards were standing a little way ahead, lounging and talking together. Beyond them was a heavy code door. And behind him the sound of voices were coming again, growing louder. They had found the same passage he had taken. They were on the way.

Jennings stepped out, the Boris gun raised. "Put up your hands. Let go of your guns."

The guards gawked at him. Kids, boys with cropped blonde hair and shiny uniforms. They moved back, pale and scared.

"The guns. Let them fall."

The two rifles clattered down. Jennings smiled. Boys. Probably this was their first encounter with trouble. Their leather boots shone, brightly polished.

"Open the door," Jennings said. "I want through."

They stared at him. Behind, the noise grew.

"Open it." He became impatient. "Come on." He waved the pistol. "Open it, damn it! Do you want me to—"

"We—we can't."

"What?"

"We can't. It's a code door. We don't have the key. Honest, mister. They don't let us have the key." They were frightened. Jennings felt fear himself, now. Behind him the drumming was louder. He was trapped, caught.

Or was he?

Suddenly he laughed. He walked quickly up to the door. "Faith," he murmured, raising his hand. "That's something you should never lose."

"What—what's that?"

"Faith in yourself. Self confidence."

The door slid back, as he held the code key against it. Blinding sunlight streamed in, making him blink. He held the gun steady. He was outside, at the gate. Three guards gaped in amazement at the gun. He was at the gate—and be-

yond lay the woods.

"Get out of the way," Jennings fired at the metal bars of the gate. The metal burst into flame, melting, a cloud of fire rising.

"Stop him!" From behind, men came pouring, guards, out of the corridor.

Jennings leaped through the smoking gate. The metal tore at him, searing him. He ran through the smoke, rolling and falling. He got to his feet and scurried on, into the trees.

He was outside. *He* had not let him down. The key had worked, all right. He had tried it first on the wrong door.

On and on he ran, sobbing for breath, pushing through the trees. Behind him the Plant and the voices fell away. He had the papers. And he was free.

HE found Kelly and gave her the film and everything he had managed to stuff into his pockets. Then he changed back to his regular clothes. Kelly drove him to the edge of Stuartsville and left him off. Jennings watched the cruiser rise up into the air, heading toward New York. Then he went into town and boarded the Inter-city rocket.

On the flight he slept, surrounded by dozing businessmen. When he awoke the rocket was settling down, landing at the huge New York

spaceport.

Jennings got off, mixing with the flow of people. Now that he was back there was the danger of being picked up by the SP again. Two security officers in their green uniforms watched him impassively as he took a taxi at the field stand. The taxi swept him into downtown traffic. Jennings wiped his brow. That was close. Now, to find Kelly.

He ate dinner at a small restaurant, sitting in the back away from the windows. When he emerged the sun was beginning to set. He walked slowly along the sidewalk, deep in thought.

So far so good. He had got the papers and film, and he had got away. The trinkets had worked every step along the way. Without them he would have been helpless. He felt in his pocket. Two left. The serrated half poker chip, and the parcel receipt. He took the receipt out, examining it in the fading evening light.

Suddenly he noticed something. The date on it was today's date. He had caught up with the slip.

He put it away, going on. What did it mean? What was it for? He shrugged. He would know, in time. And the half poker chip. What the hell was it for? No way to tell. In any case, he was certain to get through. *He* had got him by, up to now. Surely there

wasn't much left.

He came to Kelly's apartment house and stopped, looking up. Her light was on. She was back; her fast little cruiser had beaten the Inter-city rocket. He entered the elevator and rose to her floor.

"Hello," he said, when she opened her door.

"You're all right?"

"Sure. Can I come in?"

HE went inside. Kelly closed the door behind him. "I'm glad to see you. The city's swarming with SP men. Almost every block. And the patrols—"

"I know. I saw a couple at the spaceport." Jennings sat down on the couch. "It's good to be back, though."

"I was afraid they might stop all the Inter-city flights and check through the passengers."

"They have no reason to assume I'd be coming into the city."

"I didn't think of that." Kelly sat down across from him. "Now, what comes next? Now that you have got away with the material, what are you going to do?"

"Next I meet Rethrick and spring the news on him. The news that the person who escaped from the Plant was myself. He knows that someone got away, but he doesn't know who it was. Undoubtedly, he assumes it was an SP man."

"Couldn't he use the time mir-

ror to find out?"

A shadow crossed Jennings' face. "That's so. I didn't think of that." He rubbed his jaw, frowning. "In any case, I have the material. Or, you have the material."

Kelly nodded.

"All right. We'll go ahead with our plans. Tomorrow we'll see Rethrick. We'll see him here, in New York. Can you get him down to the Office? Will he come if you send for him?"

"Yes. We have a code. If I ask him to come, he'll come."

"Fine. I'll meet him there. When he realizes that we have the pictures and schematics he'll have to agree to my demands. He'll have to let me into Rethrick Construction, on my own terms. It's either that, or face the possibility of having the material turned over to the Security Police."

"And once you're in? Once Rethrick agrees to your demands?"

"I saw enough at the Plant to convince me that Rethrick is far bigger than I had realized. How big, I don't know. No wonder *he* was interested!"

"You're going to demand equal control of the Company?"

Jennings nodded.

"You would never be satisfied to go back as a mechanic, would you? The way you were before,"

"No. To get booted out again?" Jennings smiled. "Anyhow, I know

he intended better things than that. *He* laid careful plans. The trinkets. He must have planned everything long in advance. No, I'm not going back as a mechanic. I saw a lot there, level after level of machines and men. They're doing something. And I want to be in on it."

Kelly was silent.

"See?" Jennings said.

"I see."

HE left the apartment, hurrying along the dark street. He had stayed there too long. If the SP found the two of them together it would be all up with Rethrick Construction. He could take no chances, with the end almost in sight.

He looked at his watch. It was past midnight. He would meet Rethrick this morning, and present him with the proposition. His spirits rose as he walked. He would be safe. More than safe. Rethrick Construction was aiming at something far larger than mere industrial power. What he had seen had convinced him that a revolution was brewing. Down in the many levels below the ground, down under the fortress of concrete, guarded by guns and armed men, Rethrick was planning a war. Machines were being turned out. The time scoop and the mirror were hard at work, watching, dipping, extracting.

No wonder *he* had worked out such careful plans. *He* had seen all this and understood, begun to ponder. The problem of the mind cleaning. His memory would be gone, when he was released. Destruction of all the plans. Destruction? There was the alternate clause in the contract. Others had seen it, used it. But not the way *he* intended!

He was after much more than anyone who had come before. *He* was the first to understand, to plan. The seven trinkets were a bridge to something beyond anything that —

At the end of the block an SP cruiser pulled up to the curb. Its doors slid open.

Jennings stopped, his heart constricting. The night patrol, roaming through the city. It was after eleven, after curfew. He looked quickly around. Everything was dark. The stores and houses were shut up tight, locked for the night. Silent apartment houses, buildings. Even the bars were dark.

He looked back the way he had come. Behind him, a second SP cruiser had stopped. Two SP officers had stepped out onto the curb. They had seen him. They were coming toward him. He stood frozen, looking up and down the street.

Across from him was the entrance of a swank hotel, its neon sign glimmering. He began to walk

toward it, his heels echoing against the pavement.

"Stop!" one of the SP men called. "Come back here. What are you doing out? What's your—"

Jennings went up the stairs, into the hotel. He crossed the lobby. The clerk was staring at him. No one else was around. The lobby was deserted. His heart sank. He didn't have a chance. He began to run aimlessly, past the desk, along a carpeted hall. Maybe it led out some back way. Behind him, the SP men had already entered the lobby.

Jennings turned a corner. Two men stepped out, blocking his way.

"Where are you going?"

He stopped, wary. "Let me by." He reached into his coat for the Boris gun. At once the men moved.

"Get him."

HIS arms were pinned to his sides. Professional hoods. Past them he could see light. Light and sound. Some kind of activity. People.

"All right," one of the hoods said. They dragged him back along the corridor, toward the lobby. Jennings struggled futilely. He had entered a blind alley. Hoods, a joint. The city was dotted with them, hidden in the darkness. The swank hotel a front. They would toss him out, into the hands

of the SP.

Some people came along the hall, a man and a woman. Older people. Well dressed. They gazed curiously at Jennings, suspended between the two men.

Suddenly Jennings understood. A wave of relief hit him, blinding him. "Wait," he said thickly. "My pocket."

"Come on."

"Wait. Look. My right pocket. Look for yourselves."

He relaxed, waiting. The hood on his right reached, dipping cautiously into the pocket. Jennings smiled. It was over. *He* had seen even this. There was no possibility of failure. This solved one problem: where to stay until it was time to meet Rethrick. He could stay here.

The hood brought out the half poker chip, examining the serrated edges. "Just a second." From his own coat he took a matching chip, fitting on a gold chain. He touched the edges together.

"All right?" Jennings said.

"Sure." They let him go. He brushed off his coat automatically. "Sure, mister. Sorry. Say, you should have—"

"Take me in the back," Jennings said, wiping his face. "Some people are looking for me. I don't particularly want them to find me."

"Sure." They led him back, in to the gambling rooms. The half

chip had turned what might have been a disaster into an asset. A gambling and girl joint. One of the few institutions the Police left alone. He was safe. No question of that. Only one thing remained. The struggle with Rethrick!

RETHRICK'S face was hard. He gazed at Jennings, swallowing rapidly.

"No," he said. "I didn't know it was you. We thought it was the SP."

There was silence. Kelly sat at the chair by the desk, her legs crossed, a cigarette between her fingers. Jennings leaned against the door, his arms folded.

"Why didn't you use the mirror?" he said.

Rethrick's face flickered. "The mirror? You did a good job, my friend. We *tried* to use the mirror."

"Tried?"

"Before you finished your term with us you changed a few leads inside the mirror. When we tried to operate it nothing happened. I left the Plant half an hour ago. They were still working on it."

"I did that before I finished my two years?"

"Apparently you had worked out your plans in detail. You knew that with the mirror we would have no trouble tracking you down. You're a good mechanic, Jennings.

The best we ever had. We'd like to have you back, sometime. Working for us again. There's not one of us that can operate the mirror the way you could. And right now, we can't use it at all."

Jennings smiled. "I had no idea *he* did anything like that. I underestimated him. *His* protection was even—"

"Who are you talking about?"

"Myself. During the two years. I use the objective. It's easier."

"Well, Jennings? So the two of you worked out an elaborate plan to steal our schematics. Why? What's the purpose? You haven't turned them over to the Police."

"No."

"Then I can assume it's blackmail."

"That's right."

"What for? What do you want?" Rethrick seemed to have aged. He slumped, his eyes small and glassy, rubbing his chin nervously. "You went to a lot of trouble to get us into this position. I'm curious why. While you were working for us you laid the groundwork. Now you've completed it, in spite of our precautions."

"Precautions?"

"Erasing your mind. Concealing the Plant."

"Tell him," Kelly said. "Tell him why you did it."

Jennings took a deep breath.

"Rethrick, I did it to get back in. Back into the Company. That's the only reason. No other."

RETHRICK stared at him. "To get back into the Company? You can come back in. I told you that." His voice was thin and sharp, edged with strain. "What's the matter with you? You can come back in. For as long as you want to stay."

"As a mechanic."

"Yes. As a mechanic. We employ many—"

"I don't want to come back as a mechanic. I'm not interested in working for you. Listen, Rethrick. The SP picked me up as soon as I left this Office. If it hadn't been for *him* I'd be dead."

"They picked you up?"

"They wanted to know what Rethrick Construction does. They wanted me to tell them."

Rethrick nodded. "That's bad. We didn't know that."

"No, Rethrick. I'm not coming in as an employee you can toss out any time it pleases you. I'm coming in with you, not for you."

"With me?" Rethrick stared at him. Slowly a film settled over his face, an ugly hard film. "I don't understand what you mean."

"You and I are going to run Rethrick Construction together. That'll be the way, from now on. And no one will be burning my

memory out, for their own safety."

"That's what you want?"

"Yes."

"And if we don't cut you in?"

"Then the schematics and films go to the SP. It's as simple as that. But I don't want to. I don't want to destroy the Company. I want to get into the Company! I want to be safe. You don't know what it's like, being out there, with no place to go. An individual has no place to turn to, anymore. No one to help him. He's caught between two ruthless forces, a pawn between political and economic powers. And I'm tired of being a pawn."

For a long time Rethrick said nothing. He stared down at the floor, his face dull and blank. At last he looked up. "I know it's that way. That's something I've known for a long time. Longer than you have. I'm a lot older than you. I've seen it come, grow that way, year after year. That's why Rethrick Construction exists. Someday, it'll all be different. Someday, when we have the scoop and the mirror finished. When the weapons are finished."

Jennings said nothing.

"I know very well how it is! I'm an old man. I've been working a long time. When they told me someone had got out of the Plant with schematics, I thought the end had come. We already

knew you had damaged the mirror. We knew there was a connection, but we had parts figured wrong.

"We thought, of course, that Security had planted you with us, to find out what we were doing. Then, when you realized you couldn't carry out your information, you damaged the mirror. With the mirror damaged, SP could go ahead and—"

He stopped, rubbing his cheek.

"Go on," Jennings said.

"So you did this alone . . . Blackmail. To get into the Company. You don't know what the Company is for, Jennings! How dare you try to come in! We've been working and building for a long time. You'd wreck us, to save your hide. You'd destroy us, just to save yourself."

"I'm not wrecking you. I can be a lot of help."

"I run the Company alone. It's my Company. I made it, put it together. It's mine."

JENNINGS laughed. "And what happens when you die? Or is the revolution going to come in your own lifetime?"

Rethrick's head jerked up.

"You'll die, and there won't be anyone to go on. You know I'm a good mechanic. You said so yourself. You're a fool, Rethrick. You want to manage it all yourself. Do everything, decide every-

thing. But you'll die, someday. And then what will happen?"

There was silence.

"You better let me in—for the Company's good, as well as my own. I can do a lot for you. When you're gone the Company will survive in my hands. And maybe the revolution will work."

"You should be glad you're alive at all! If we hadn't allowed you to take your trinkets out with you—"

"What else could you do? How could you let men service your mirror, see their own futures, and not let them lift a finger to help themselves. It's easy to see why you were forced to insert the alternate payment clause. You had no choice."

"You don't even know what we are doing. Why we exist."

"I have a good idea. After all, I worked for you two years."

Time passed. Rethrick moistened his lips again and again, rubbing his cheek. Perspiration stood out on his forehead. At last he looked up.

"No," he said. "It's no deal. No one will ever ruin the Company but me. If I die, it dies with me. It's my property."

Jennings became instantly alert. "Then the papers go to the Police."

Rethrick said nothing, but a peculiar expression moved across his face, an expression that gave Jen-

nings a sudden chill.

"Kelly," Jennings said. "Do you have the papers with you?"

Kelly stirred, standing up. She put out her cigarette, her face pale. "No."

"Where are they? Where did you put them?"

"Sorry," Kelly said softly. "I'm not going to tell you."

He stared at her. "What?"

"I'm sorry," Kelly said again. Her voice was small and faint. "They're safe. The SP won't ever get them. But neither will you. When it's convenient, I'll turn them back to my father."

"Your father!"

"Kelly is my daughter," Rethrick said. "That was one thing you didn't count on, Jennings. *He* didn't count on it, either. No one knew that but the two of us. I wanted to keep all positions of trust in the family. I see now that it was a good idea. But it had to be kept secret. If the SP had guessed they would have picked her up at once. Her life wouldn't have been safe."

JENNINGS let his breath out slowly. "I see."

"It seemed like a good idea to go along with you," Kelly said. "Otherwise you'd have done it alone, anyhow. And you would have had the papers on you. As you said, if the SP caught you

with the papers it would be the end of us. So I went along with you. As soon as you gave me the papers I put them in a good safe place." She smiled a little. "No one will find them but me. I'm sorry."

"Jennings, you can come in with us," Rethrick said. "You can work for us forever, if you want. You can work for us, be a part of us. You can have anything you want. Anything except—"

"Except that no one runs the Company but you."

"That's right. Jennings, the Company is old. Older than I am. I didn't bring it into existence. It was—you might say, *willed* to me. I took the burden on. The job of managing it, making it grow, moving it toward the day. The day of revolution, as you put it.

"My grandfather founded the Company, back in the twentieth century. The Company has always been in the family. And it will always be. Someday, when Kelly marries, there'll be an heir to carry it on after me. So that's taken care of. The Company was founded up in Maine, in a small New England town. My grandfather was a little old New Englander, frugal, honest, passionately independent. He had a little repair business of some sort, a little tool and fix-it place. And plenty of knack.

"When he saw government and big business closing in on everyone, he went underground. Rethrick Construction disappeared from the map. It took government quite a while to organize Maine, longer than most places. When the rest of the world had been divided up between international cartels and world-states, there was New England, still alive. Still free. And my grandfather and Rethrick Construction.

"He brought in a few men, mechanics, doctors, lawyers, little once-a-week newspaper men from the Middle West. The Company grew. Weapons appeared, weapons and knowledge. The time scoop and mirror! The Plant was built, secretly, at great cost, over a long period of time. The Plant is big. Big and deep. It goes down many more levels than you saw. *He* saw them, your alter ego. There's a lot of power there. Power, and men who've disappeared, purged all over the world, in fact. We got them first, the best of them.

"Someday, Jennings, we're going to break out. You see, conditions like this can't go on. People can't live this way, tossed back and forth by political and economic powers. Masses of people shoved this way and that according to the needs of this government or that cartel. There's going to be resistance, someday. A strong, desperate

resistance. Not by big people, powerful people, but by little people. Bus drivers. Grocers. Vid-screen operators. Waiters. And that's where the Company comes in.

"We're going to provide them with the help they'll need, the tools, weapons, the knowledge. We're going to 'sell' them our services. They'll be able to hire us. And they'll need someone they can hire. They'll have a lot lined up against them. A lot of wealth and power."

There was silence.

"Do you see?" Kelly said. "That's why you mustn't interfere. It's Dad's Company. It's always been that way. That's the way Maine people are. It's part of the family. The Company belongs to the family. It's ours."

"Come in with us," Rethrick said. "As a mechanic. I'm sorry, but that's our limited outlook showing through. Maybe it's narrow, but we've always done things this way."

Jennings said nothing. He walked slowly across the Office, his hands in his pockets. After a time he raised the blind and stared out at the street, far below.

DOWN below, like a tiny black bug, a Security cruiser moved along, drifting silently with the traffic that flowed up and down the street. It joined a second

cruiser, already parked. Four SP men were standing by it in their green uniforms, and even as he watched some more could be seen coming from across the street. He let the blind down.

"It's a hard decision to make," he said.

"If you go out there they'll get you," Rethrick said. "They're out there all the time. You haven't got a chance."

"Please—" Kelly said, looking up at him.

Suddenly Jennings smiled. "So you won't tell me where the papers are. Where you put them."

Kelly shook her head.

"Wait." Jennings reached into his pocket. He brought out a small piece of paper. He unfolded it slowly, scanning it. "By any chance did you deposit them with the Dunne National Bank, about three o'clock yesterday afternoon? For safekeeping in their storage vaults?"

Kelly gasped. She grabbed her handbag, unsnapping it. Jennings put the slip of paper, the parcel receipt, back in his pocket. "So *he* saw even that," he murmured. "The last of the trinkets. I wondered what it was for."

Kelly groped frantically in her purse, her face wild. She brought out a slip of paper, waving it.

"You're wrong! Here it is! It's still here." She relaxed a little.

"I don't know what *you* have, but this is—"

In the air above them something moved. A dark space formed, a circle. The space stirred. Kelly and Rethrick stared up, frozen.

From the dark circle a claw appeared, a metal claw, joined to a shimmering rod. The claw dropped, swinging in a wide arc. The claw swept the paper from Kelly's fingers. It hesitated for a second. Then it drew itself up again, disappearing with the paper, into the circle of black. Then, silently, the claw and the rod and the circle blinked out. There was nothing. Nothing at all.

"Where—where did it go?" Kelly whispered. "The paper. What

was that?"

Jennings patted his pocket. "It's safe. It's safe, right here. I wondered when *he* would show up. I was beginning to worry.

Rethrick and his daughter stood, shocked into silence.

"Don't look so unhappy," Jennings said. He folded his arms. "The paper's safe—and the Company's safe. When the time comes it'll be there, strong and very glad to help out the revolution. We'll see to that, all of us, you, me, and your daughter."

He glanced at Kelly, his eyes twinkling. "All three of us. And maybe by that time there'll be even *more* members to the family!"

THE END



"Accuracy is our big problem—that took two shots!"



Worlds Without...



THERE is a world without us.

It is adjacent and parallel to our own—yet it is not of us. It is a shadow-world, manifesting itself in curious ways, subtle ways, devious ways. It is a world which influences us and yet which we refuse to acknowledge as even existing. It is a world which could readily account for the untold mysteries which surround us. It is an alien world—and yet it is overtly aggressive only at times.

Consider some of the innumerable vanishments of human beings which seem to occur with monotonous regularity—"John Smith—age 42—whereabouts unknown—has been missing since nineteen-thirty-six." Multiply this one disappearance by a million and you have a decade's toll. Go as far back to the famous mystery of the vanished crew of the *Marie Celeste*. Come forward to the present and add up the strange losses of ships and aircraft.

Think on these things and then try and rationalize them with all the powers of modern science. You can't!

For that matter sneak into the realm of science and find an explanation of the weird cosmic radiation which bombards every-

where, all the time. Better yet, probe for an explanation of the scientists' wave plus particle theory, or an understanding of the nature of gravity. No matter how you press, no answers will be forthcoming.

How can we say then, with clarity and coldness that there are not more things twixt heaven and earth than we have dreamt of in our philosophies? The Fortean with their clever allusions to inexplicable incidents, with the coldly objective tally of strange phenomena the world over, may not be wrong in assuming an inimical outer-world working at cross purposes with—or against—Man. Certainly you cannot survey the state of things today and say that reason and rationality reign everywhere—this in spite of our vaunted technologies. We seem as children playing with toys.

Who can say in the Grand Design of things, that a world outside ours was not made? Certainly the evidence of our senses seems to confirm it, to confirm it in a most unmythical and thoughtful manner. Things happen and we can't explain them at all—except if we open our minds and admit the evidences of affairs beyond our ken...

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Unless Crae could kill his jealous
rage his love with Ellena would die. But
to do it he had to seek out—and catch—

THE GRUNDER

By

Zenna Henderson

ALMOST before Crae brought the car to a gravel-spraying stop in front of the Murmuring Pines Store and Station, Ellena had the door open and was out and around the corner marked

His and Hers. Crae stared angrily after her, his jaw set and his lips moving half-audibly. Anger burned brightly in his brain and the tight, swollen sickness inside him throbbed like a boil. It was all



her fault—all because she had to smile at every man—she had to entice every male—she always—! And then the fire was gone and Crae slumped down into the ashes of despair. It was no use. No matter how hard he tried—no matter what he did, it always ended this way.

This was to have been it. This trip into the White Mountains—a long happy fishing trip for the two of them to celebrate because he was learning to curb his jealousy, his blind, unreasoning, unfounded jealousy that was wrecking everything he and Ellena had planned for a life together. It had gone so well. The shadowy early morning beginning, the sweep up the hills from the baking, blistering valley, the sudden return to Spring as they reached pine country, the incredible greenness of everything after the dust and dryness of the desert.

And then they had stopped at Lakeside.

She said she had only asked how the fishing was. *She* said they had known the same old timers. *She* said—! Crae slid lower in the car seat, writhing inside as he remembered his icy return to the car, his abrupt backing away from the laughing group that clustered around Ellena's window, his measured, insane accusations and the light slowly dying out of Ellena's

eyes, the quiet, miserable turning away of her white face and her silence as the car roared on—through hell as far as the two of them were concerned—through the rolling timberland to Murmuring Pines.

Crae wrenched himself up out of his futile rememberings and slid out of the car, slamming the door resoundingly. He climbed the three steps up to the sagging store porch and stopped, fumbling for a cigarette.

"Wife trouble?"

CRAE started as the wheezy old voice from the creaking rocking chair broke through his misery. He stared over his half-raised cigarette into the faded blue eyes that peered through dirty bifocals at him. Then he put the cigarette in his mouth and cupped his palms around his light.

"What's it to you?" he half-snapped, but even his hair-triggered temper seemed to have deserted him.

"Nothing, son, nothing." The chair rocked violently, then slowed down. "Only thing is, I kinda wondered, seeing her kite outa the car like that and you standing there, sulling up. Sit down a spell. I'm Eli. Old Eli."

Inexplicably, Crae sat down on the top step and said, "You're right, Eli. Plenty of trouble, but it's none—not my wife."

"Oh, thataway." The frousy old head nodded.

"Yeah," muttered Crae, wondering dismally why he should be spilling his guts to a busted down old coot like this one, "Jealous, crazy jealous."

"Can't trust her, huh?" The chair rocked madly a moment then slowed again.

"I can too!" flared Crae.

"Then what's the kick?" The old man spat toward the porch railing. "Way I see it, it takes a certain amount of cooperation from a woman before she can go far wrong. If you can trust your wife, whatcha got to worry about?"

"Nothing," muttered Crae. "I know I've got nothing to worry about. But," his hand clenched on his knee, "if only I could be sure! I know there's no logical reason for the way I feel. I know she wouldn't look at anyone else. But I can't feel it! All the knowing in the world doesn't do any good if you can't feel it."

"That's a hunk of truth if I ever heard one," wheezed the old man, leaning across his fat belly and poking a stubby finger at Crae. "Like getting turned around in directions. You can say 'That's East' all you want to, but if it don't feel like East then the sun goes on coming up in the North."

There was a brief pause and Crae lifted his face to the cool

pine-heavy breeze that hummed through the trees, wondering again why he was spreading his own private lacerations out for this gross, wheezing, not-too-clean old stranger.

"Them there psy-chiatrists—some say they can help fellers like you."

Crae shook his head. "I've been going to a counselor for three months. I thought I had it licked. I was sure—" Crae's voice trailed off as he remembered why he had finally consented to go to a counselor.

"Bring a child into an atmosphere like this?" Ellena's voice was an agonized whisper, "How can we Crae, how can we? Anger and fear and mistrust. Never—not until—"

And his bitter rejoinder. "It's you and your slutting eyes that make 'this atmosphere'. If I don't watch out you'll be bringing me someone else's child—"

And then his head was ringing from the lightning quick blow to his face, before she turned, blazing-eyed and bitter, away from him.

"No go, huh?" The old shoulders shrugged and the old man wiped one hand across his stubby chin.

"No go, damn me, and our vacation is ruined before it begins."

"Too bad. Where you going? Big Lake?"

"No. South Fork of East Branch. Heard they've opened the closed part of the stream. Should be good fishing."

"South Fork?" The chair agitated wildly, then slowed. "Funny coincidence, that."

"Coincidence?" Crae glanced up.

"Yeah. I mean you, feeling like you do, going fishing on South Fork."

"What's my feelings got to do with it?" asked Crae, doubly sorry now that he had betrayed himself to the old feller. What good had it done? Nothing could help—ever—but still he sat.

"WELL, son, there's quite a story about South Fork. Dunno when it started. Might be nothing to it." The faded eyes peered sharply through the glasses at him. "Then again, there might."

"What's the deal?" Crae's voice was absent and his eyes were on the His and Hers signs. "I've been coming up here for five years now and I never heard any special story."

"Seems there's a fish," said the old man. "A kinda special kinda fish. Not many see him and he ain't been seen nowhere around this part of the country 'ceptin on South Fork. Nobody's ever caught him, not to land anyway."

"Oh, one of those. Patriarch of the creek. Willy eluder of bait.

Stuff like that?"

"Oh, not exactly." The rocking chair accelerated and slowed. "This here one is something special."

"I'll hear about it later, Pop." Crae stood up. Ellena was coming back down the path, outwardly serene and cool again. But she went in the side door into the store and Crae sat down slowly.

"They say it's a little longer than a man and maybe a man's reach around." The old man went on as though not interrupted.

"Pretty big—" Crae muttered absently, then snapped alert. "Hey! What are you trying to pull? A fish that size couldn't get in South Fork, let alone live there. Bet there aren't ten places from Baldy to Sheep's Crossing as deep as five feet even at flood stage. What kind of line you trying to hand me?"

"Told you it was kinda special." The old man creased his eyes with a gap-toothed grin. "This here fish don't live in the creek. He don't even swim in it. Just happens to rub his top fin along it once in a while. And not just this part of the country, neither. Heard about him all over the world, likely. This here fish is a Grunder—swims through dirt and rocks like they was water. Water feels to him like air. Air is a lot of nothing to him. Told a feller about him once. He told me might be

this here Grunder's from a nother dy-mention." The old man worked his discolored lips silently for a moment. "He said it like it was supposed to explain something. Don't make sense to me."

Crae relaxed and laced his fingers around one knee. Oh, well, if it was that kind of story—might as well enjoy it.

"Anyway," went on the old man, "Like I said, this here Grunder's a special fish. Magic, us old timers would call it. Dunno what you empty, don't-believe-nothing-without-touch-it-taste-it-hear - it - proof younguns would call it. But here's where it hits you, young feller." The old finger was jabbing at Crae again. "This here Grunder is a sure cure for jealousy. All you gotta do is catch him, rub him three times the wrong way and you'll never doubt your love again."

Crae laughed bitterly, stung by fear that he was being ridiculed. "Easy to say and hard to prove, Pop. Who could catch a magic fish as big as that on trout lines? Pretty smart, fixing it so no one can prove you're a ring-tailed liar."

"Laugh, son," grunted the old man, "while you can. But who said anything about a trout line? Special fish, special tackle. They say the Grunder won't even rise nowhere without special bait." The old man leaned forward, his breath sounding as though it came

through a fine meshed screen. "Better listen, son. Laugh if you wanta, but listen good. Could be one of these fine days you'll wanta cast a line for the Grunder. Can't ever sometimes tell."

The tight sickness inside Crae gave a throb and he licked dry lips.

"There's a pome," the old man went on, leaning back in his chair, patting the front of his dirty checked shirt as he gasped for breath. "Old as the Grunder most likely. Tells you what kinda tackle."

"Make your line from her linen fair.

Take your hook from her silken hair.

A broken heart must be your share

For the Grunder."

The lines sang in Crae's mind, burning their way into his skeptical brain.

"What bait?" he asked, trying to keep his voice light and facetious. "Must be kind of scarce for a fish like that."

The faded old eyes peered at him. "Scarce? Well, now that depends," the old man said. "Listen.

"This is your bait, or your lure or flies,

Take her sobs when your lady cries,

Take the tears that fall from her eyes

For the Grunder."

CRAE felt the sting of the words. The only time he'd seen Ellena cry over his tantrums was the first time he'd really blown his top. That was the time she'd tried to defend herself, tried to reason with him, tried to reassure him and finally had dissolved into tears of frustration, sorrow and disillusionment. Since then, if there had been tears, he hadn't seen them — only felt her heart breaking inch by inch as she averted her white, still face from his rages and accusations.

"My wife doesn't cry," he said petulantly.

"Pore woman," said the old man, reaming one ear with his little finger. "Anyway, happen some day you'll want to go fishing for the Grunder, you won't forget."

The sound of Ellena's laughter inside the store drew Crae to his feet. Maybe they could patch this vacation together after all. Maybe Ellena could put up with him just once more. Crae's heart contracted as he realized that every 'once more' was bringing them inevitably to the 'never again' time for him and Ellena.

He went to the screen door of the store and opened it. Behind him, he could hear the creak of the old man's chair.

"Course you gotta believe in the Grunder. Nothing works less'n you believe it. And be mighty cer-

tain, son, that you want him when you fish for him. Once you hook him, you gotta hold him 'till you stroke him. And every scale on his body is jagged edged on the down side. Rip hell outa your hand first stroke—but three it's gotta be. Three times—"

"O. K., Pop. Three times it is. Quite a story you've got there." Crae let the door slam behind him as he went into the shadowy store and took the groceries from an Ellena who smiled into his eyes and said, "Hello, honey."

A WEEK later, the two of them lolled on the old army blanket on the spread-out tarp, half in the sun, half in the shade, watching the piling of dazzling bright summer thunderheads over Baldy. Stuffed with mountain trout, and drowsy with sun, Crae felt that the whole world was as bright as the sky above them. He was still aglow from catching his limit nearly every day since they arrived, and that, along with just plain vacation delight, filled him with such a feeling of contentment and well-being that it overflowed in a sudden rush of tenderness and he yanked Ellena over to him. She laughed against his chest and shifted her feet into the sun.

"They freeze in the shade and roast in the sun," she said, "Isn't it marvelous up here?"

"Plumb sightly, Maam," drawled Crae.

"Just smell the spruce," said Ellena, sitting up and filling her lungs ecstatically.

"Yeah, and the fried fish," Crae sat up, too, and breathed in noisily. "And the swale, and," he sniffed again, "just a touch of skunk."

"Oh, Crae!" Ellena cried reproachfully, "Don't spoil it!" She pushed him flat on the blanket and collapsed, laughing, against him.

"Oof!" grunted Crae. "A few more weeks of six fish at a sitting and all the rest of the grub you're stashing away and I'll have to haul you home in a stock trailer!"

"Six fish!" Ellena pummeled him with both fists. "I'm darn lucky to salvage two out of the ten when you get started—and I saw you letting your belt out three notches. Now who's fat stuff!"

They scuffled, laughing helplessly, until they both rolled off the blanket onto the squishy black ground that was still wet from spring and the nearness of the creek. Ellena shrieked and Crae, scrambling to his feet yanked her up to him. For a long minute they stood locked in each other's arms, listening to the muted roar of the little falls just above camp and a bird crying, "See me? See me?" from the top of a spruce somewhere.

Then Ellena stirred and half-whispered, "Oh, Crae, it's so wonderful up here. Why can't it always—" Then she bit her lip and buried her face against him.

Crae's heart reluctantly took up its burden again. "Please God, it will be," he promised. "Like this always." And she lifted her face to his kiss.

Then he pushed her away.

"Now, Frau, break out the corn meal and the frying pan again. I'm off to the races." He slipped the creel on and picked up his rod. "I'm going down where the old beaver dam used to be. That's where the big ones are, I'll betcha."

"'Bye, Honey," Ellena kissed the end of his sun-burned nose. "Personally, I think I'll have a cheese sandwich for supper. A little fish goes a long way with me."

"Woman!" Crae was horrified, "What you said!"

He looked back from the top of the logging railroad embankment and saw Ellena squatting down by the creek, dipping water into the blackened five gallon can they used for a water heater. He yelled down at her and she waved at him, then turned back to her work. Crae filled his lungs with the crisp scented air and looked slowly around at the wooded hills, still cherishing drifts of snow in their shadowy folds, the high

reaching mountains that lifted the spruce and scattered pines against an aching blue sky, the creek, brawling its flooded way like an exuberant snake flinging its shining loops first one way and then another and his tight little, tidy little camp tucked into one of the wider loops of the creek.

"This is it," he thought happily. "From perfection like this, we can't help getting straightened out. All I needed was a breathing spell."

Then he set out with swinging steps down the far side of the embankment.

CRAE huddled deeper in his light levi jacket as he topped the rise on the return trip. The clouds were no longer white shining towers of pearl and blue, but heavy rolling grey, blanketing the sky. The temperature had dropped with the loss of the sun and he shivered in the sudden blare of wind that slapped him in the face with a dozen hail-hard rain drops and then died.

But his creel hung heavy on his hip and he stepped along lightly, still riding on his noontime delirium. His eyes sought out the camp and he opened his mouth to yell for Ellena. His steps slowed and stopped and his face smoothed out blankly as he looked at the strange car pulled up behind theirs.

The sick throbbing inside him

began again and the blinding flame began to flicker behind his eyes. With a desperate firmness he soothed himself and walked slowly down to camp. As he neared the tent, the flap was pushed open and Ellena and several men crowded out into the chill wind.

"See," cried Ellena, "Here's Crae now." She ran to him, face aglow—and eyes pleading. "How did you do, Honey?"

"Pretty good." Somewhere he stood off and admired the naturalness of his answer. "Nearly got my limit, but of course the biggest one got away. No fooling!"

Ellena and the strange faces laughed with him and then they were all crowding around, admiring the catch and pressing the bottle into his cold hands.

"Come on in the tent," Ellena tugged at his arm. "We've got a fire going. It got too cold to sit outdoors."

Then she was introducing the men in the flare and hiss of the Coleman lantern while they warmed themselves at the little tin stove that was muttering over the new pine knots just pushed in.

"This is Jess and Doc and Stubby and Dave." She looked up at Crae. "My husband, Crae."

"Howdy," said Crae.

"Hi, Crae," Jess stuck out a huge hand. "Fine wife you got there. Snatched us from death's door."

Hot coffee and that ever lovin' old bottle. We were colder'n a dead Eskimo's—wup—ladies present."

Ellena laughed. "Well, lady or not, I know the rest of that one. But now that we've got fish again, why don't you men stay for supper?" She glanced over at Crae.

"Sure," said Crae carefully cordial. "Why not?"

"Thanks," said Jess, "But we've stayed too long now. Fascinating woman, your wife, Crae. Couldn't tear ourselves away, but now the old man's home—" He roared with laughter. "Guess we better slope, huh, fellers? Gotta pitch camp before dark."

"Yeah. Can't make any time with the husband around," said Stubby. Then he leaned over and stage-whispered to Ellena. "I ain't so crazy 'bout fishing. How 'bout letting me know when he's gone again?"

AFTER the laughter, Crae said, "Better have another jolt before you get out into the weather." So the bottle made the rounds slowly and finally everyone ducked out of the tent into the bleakly windy out of doors. The men piled into the car and Jess leaned out the window.

"Thought we'd camp up above you," he roared against the wind, "But it's flooded out. Guess we'll go on down stream to the other

camp ground." He looked around admiringly. "Tight little set up you got here."

"Thanks," yelled Crae, "We think so too."

"Well, be seeing you!" And the car surged up the sharp drop from the road, the little trailer swishing along in back. Crae and Ellena watched them disappear over the railroad.

"Well," Crae turned and laid his fist against Ellena's cheek and pushed lightly. "How about chow, Frau? Might as well get supper over with. Looks like we're in for some weather."

"O. K., Boss," Ellena's eyes were shining. "Right away, sir!" And she scurried away, calling back, "But you'd better get the innards out of those denizens of the deep so I can get them in the pan."

"O. K." Crae moved slowly and carefully as though something might break if he moved fast. He squatted by the edge of the stream and clumsily began to clean the fish. When he had finished, his hands were numb from the icy snow water and the persistent wind out of the west, but not nearly as numb as he felt inside. He carried the fish over to the cook bench where Ellena shivered over the two burner stove.

"Here you are," he said slowly and Ellena's eyes flew to his face. He smiled carefully. "Make

them plenty crisp and step it up!"

Ellena's smile was relieved. "Crisp it is!"

"Where's a rag to wipe my shoes off with? Shoulda worn my waders. There's mud and water everywhere this year."

"My old petticoat's hanging over there on the tree—if you don't mind an embroidered shoe rag."

Crae took down the cotton half-slip with eyelet embroidery around the bottom.

"This is a rag?" he asked.

She laughed. "It's ripped almost full length and the elastic's worn out. Go ahead and use it."

Crae worked out of his wet shoes and socks and changed into dry. Then he lifted one shoe and the rag and sat hunched over himself on the log. With a horrible despair, he felt all the old words bubbling and the scab peeling off the hot sickness inside him. His fist tightened on the white rag until his knuckles cracked. Desperately, he tried to change his thoughts, but the bubbling putrescence crept through his mind and poured its bitterness into his mouth and he heard himself say bitterly,

"How long were they here before I showed up?"

Ellena turned slowly from the stove, her shoulders drooping, her face despairing.

"About a half hour." Then she

straightened and looked desperately over at him. "No, Crae, please. Not here. Not now."

Crae looked blindly down at the shoe he still held in one hand. He clenched his teeth until his jaws ached, but the words pushed through anyway—biting and venomous.

"Thirty miles from anywhere. Just have to turn my back and they come flocking! You can't tell me you don't welcome them! You can't tell me you don't encourage them and entice them and —" He slammed his shoe down and dropped the rag beside it. In two strides he caught her by both shoulders and shook her viciously. "Hellamighty! You even built a fire in the tent for them! What's the matter, woman, are you slipping? You've got any number of ways to take their minds off the cold without building a fire!"

"Crae! Crae!" She whispered pleadingly.

"Don't 'Crae, Crae' me!" He back-handed her viciously across the face. She cried out and fell sideways against the tree. Her hair caught on the rough stub of a branch as she started to slide down against the trunk. Crae grabbed one of her arms and yanked her up. Her caught hair strained her head backwards as he lifted. And suddenly her smooth sun-tinted throat fitted Crae's two

spasmed hands. For an eternity his thumbs felt the sick pounding of her pulse. Then a tear slid slowly down from one closed eye, trickling towards her ear.

Crae snatched his hand away before the tear could touch it. Ellena slid to her knees, leaving a dark strand of hair on the bark of the tree. She got slowly to her feet. She turned without a word or look and went into the tent.

CRAE slumped down on the log, his hands limp between his knees, his head hanging. He lifted his hands and looked at them incredulously, then he flung them from him wildly, turned and shoved his face hard up against the rough tree trunk.

"Oh, God!" he thought wildly. "I must be going crazy! I never hit her before. I never tried to—" He beat his doubled fists against the tree until the knuckles crimsoned, then he crouched again above his all-enveloping misery until the sharp smell of burning food penetrated his daze. He walked blindly over to the camp stove and yanked the smoking skillet off. He turned off the fire and dumped the curled charred fish into the garbage can and dropped the skillet on the ground.

He stood uncertain, noticing for the first time the scattered sprinkling of rain patterning the top of

the split log table near the stove. He started automatically for the car to roll the windows up.

And then he saw Ellena standing just outside the tent. Afraid to move or speak, he stood watching her. She came slowly over to him. In the half-dusk he could see the red imprint of his hand across her cheek. She looked up at him with empty, drained eyes.

"We will go home tomorrow." Her voice was expressionless and almost steady. "I'm leaving as soon as we get there."

"Ellena, don't!" Crae's voice shook with pleading and despair.

Ellena's mouth quivered and tears over-flowed. She dropped her sodden, crumpled kleenex and took a fresh one from her shirt pocket. She carefully wiped her eyes.

"It's better to snuff a candle—" Her voice choked off and Crae felt his heart contract. They had read the book together and picked out their favorite quote and now she was using it to—

Crae held out his hands, "Please, Ellena, I promise—"

"Promise!" Her eyes blazed so violently that Crae stumbled back a step. "You've been trying to mend this sick thing between us with promises for too long!" Her voice was taut with anger. "Neither you nor I believe your promises any more. There's not one val-

id reason why I should try to keep our marriage going by myself. You don't believe in it anymore. You don't believe in me anymore—if you ever did. You don't even believe in yourself! Nothing will work if you don't believe—" Her voice wavered and broke. She mopped her eyes carefully again and her voice was measured and cold as she said, "We'll leave for home tomorrow—and God have mercy on us both."

She turned away blindly, burying her face in her two hands and stumbled into the tent.

Crae sat down slowly on the log beside his muddy shoes. He picked up one and fumbled for the cleaning rag. He huddled over himself, feeling as though life were draining from his arms and legs, leaving them limp.

"It's all finished," he thought hopelessly. "It's finished and I'm finished and this whole crazy damn life is finished. I've done everything I know. Nothing on this earth can ever make it right between us again."

You don't believe, you don't believe. And then a wheezy old voice whistled in his ear. *Nothing works, less'n you believe in it.* Crae straightened up, following the faint thread of voice. *Happen some day you want to go fishing, you won't forget.*

"It's crazy and screwy and a lot

of hogwash," thought Crae. "Things like that can't possibly exist."

You don't believe. Nothing works less'n—

A strange compound feeling of hope and wonder began to well up in Crae. "Maybe, maybe," he thought breathlessly. Then—"It will work. It's got to work!"

EAGERLY intent, he went back over the incident at the store. All he could remember at first was the rocking chair and the thick discolored lips of the old man, then a rhythm began in his mind, curling to a rhyme word at the end of each line. He heard the raspy old voice again—

Happen some day you want to go fishing, you won't forget. And the lines slowly took form.

"Make your line from her linen fair.

Take your hook from her silken hair.

A broken heart must be your share

For the Grunder."

"Why that's impossible on the face of it," thought Crae with a pang of despair. "The broken heart I've got—but the rest? Hook from her hair?" Hair? Hair pin—bobby pin. He fumbled in his shirt pocket. Where were they? Yesterday, upcreek when Ellena decided to put her hair in pig-tails

because the wind was so strong, she had given him the pins she took out. He held the slender piece of metal in his hand for a moment then straightened it carefully between his fingers. He slowly bent one end of it up in an approximation of a hook. He stared at it ruefully. What a fragile thing to hang hope on.

Now for a line.—*her linen fair.* Linen? Ellen brought nothing linen to camp with her. He fumbled with the makeshift hook, peering intently into the dusk, tossing the line of verse back and forth in his mind. Linen's not just cloth. Linen can be clothes. Body linen. He lifted the shoe rag. An old slip—ripped.

In a sudden frenzy of haste, he ripped the white cloth into inch wide strips and knotted them together, carefully rolling the knobby, ravelly results into a ball. The material was so old and thin that one strip parted as he tested a knot and he had to tie it again. When the last strip was knotted, he struggled to fasten his improvised hook onto it. Finally, bending another hook at the opposite end, sticking it through the material, splitting the end, he knotted it as securely as he could. He peered at the results and laughed bitterly at the precarious makeshift.

"But it'll work," he told himself fiercely. "It'll work. I'll catch

that damn Grunder and get rid once and for all of whatever it is that's eating me!"

And for bait? *Take the tears that fall from her eyes—*

Crae searched the ground under the tree beside him. There it was, the sodden, greyed blob of kleenex Ellena had dropped. He picked it up gingerly and felt it tatter, tear-soaked and rain-soaked, in his fingers. Remembering her tears, his hand closed convulsively over the soaked tissue. When he loosed his fingers from it, he could see their impress in the pulp, almost as he had seen his hand print on her cheek. He baited the hook and nearly laughed again as he struggled to keep the wad of paper in place. Closing one hand tightly about the hook, the other around the ball of cotton, he went to the tent door. For a long, rain-emphasized moment he listened. There was no sound from inside, so with only his heart saying it, he shaped, "I love you," with his mouth and turned away, up-stream.

THE rain was slanting icy wires now that stabbed his face and cut through his wet jacket. He stood on the rough foot bridge across the creek and leaned over the hand rail, feeling the ragged bark pressing against his stomach. He held his clenched fists up before his face and stared at them.

"This is it," he thought. "Our last chance—*My last chance.*" Then he bent his head down over his hands, feeling the bite of his thumb joints into his forehead. "Oh, God, make it true—make it true!"

Then he loosed the hand that held the hook, tapped the soggy wad of kleenex to make sure it was still there and lowered it cautiously toward the roaring, brawling creek, still swollen from the afternoon sun on hillside snow. He rotated the ball slowly, letting the line out. He gasped as the hook touched the water and he felt the current catch it and sweep it downstream. He yelled to the roaring, rain-drenched darkness, "I believe! I believe!" And the limp, tattered line in his hand snapped taut, pulling until it cut into the flesh of his palm. It strained down-stream and, as he looked, it took on a weird fluorescent glow and, skipping on the black edge of the next down-stream curve, the hook and bait were vivid with the same glowing.

Crae played out more of the line to ease the pressure on his palm. The line was as tight and strong as piano wire between his fingers.

Time stopped for Crae as he leaned against the rail watching the bobbing light on the end of the line—waiting and waiting. wondering if the Grunder was com-

ing, if it could taste Ellena's tears across the world. Rain dripped from the end of his nose and whispered down past his ears.

Then out of the darkness and waiting, lightning licked across the sky and thunder thudded in giant, bone-jarring steps down from the top of Baldy. Crae winced as sudden vivid light played around him again, perilously close. But no thunder followed and he opened his eyes to a blade of light slicing cleanly through the foot bridge from side to side. Crae bit his lower lip as the light resolved itself into a dazzling fin that split the waters, slit the willows and sliced through the boulders at the bend of the creek and disappeared.

"The Grunder!" he called out hoarsely and unreeled the last of his line, stumbling to the end of the bridge to follow in blind pursuit through the darkness. As his feet splashed in the icy waters, the Grunder lifted in a high arching leap beyond the far willows. Crae slid rattling down the creek bank onto one knee. The swift current swung him off balance and twisted him so that his back was to the stream, and he felt the line slip through his fingers. Desperately, he jerked around and lunged for the escaping line, the surge of the waters pushing him face down into the shallow stream. With a gurgling sob, he surfaced and

snatched the last turn of the winding strip from where it had snagged on the stub of a water-soaked log.

HE pulled himself up onto the soggy bank, strangling, spewing water, blinking to clear his eyes. Soaked through, numbed by the cold water and the icy wind, with shaking hands he fashioned a loop in the end of the line and secured it around his left wrist, his eyes flicking from loop to line, making sure the hook and bait were still there. He started cautiously down stream, slipping and sliding through the muck, jarring into holes, tripping on rises, intent on keeping his bait in sight. A willow branch lashed across his eyes and blinded him. While he blinked away involuntary tears, trying to clear the dazzle that blurred his sight, the Grunder swept back upstream, passing so close that Crae could see the stainless steel gleam of overlapping scales, serrated and jagged, that swept cleanly down its wide sides to a gossamer tail and up to a blind looking head with its wide band of brilliant blue, glittering like glass beads, masking its face from side to side where eyes should have been. Below the glitters was its open maw, ringed about with flickering points of scarlet.

Crae squatted down in the mud,

staring after the Grunder, lost, bewildered and scared. He clasped his hands to steady the bobbing steel-like ribbon of line that gouged into his wrist and jerked his whole arm. Was the Grunder gone? Had he lost his last chance? He ducked his head to shelter his face from the drenching downpour that seethed on the water loud enough to be heard above the roar of a dozen small falls.

Then suddenly, without warning, he was jerked downstream by his left arm, scraping full length along the soggy bank until his shoulder snagged on a stunted willow stump. He felt the muscles in his shoulder crack from the sudden stop. He wormed his way up until he could get hold of the line with his right hand, then, twisting forward, he braced both feet against the stump and heaved. The line gave slightly. And then he was cowering beneath lifted arms as the Grunder jumped silently, its tail flailing the water to mist, its head shaking against the frail hook that was imbedded in its lower jaw.

"Got it!" gasped Crae, "Got it!"

That was the last rational thought Crae had for the next crashing eternity. Yanked by the leaping, twisting, fighting Grunder, upstream and downstream, sometimes on his feet, sometimes dragged full length through the

tangled underbrush, sometimes with the Grunder charging him head on, all fire and gleam and terror, other times with only the thread of light tenuously pointing the way the creature had gone, Crae had no world but a whirling, breathless, painfilled chaos that had no meaning or point beyond *Hold on hold on hold on*.

Crae saw the bridge coming, but he could no more stop or dodge than a railway tunnel can dodge a train. With a crack that splintered into a flare of light that shamed the Grunder in brilliance, Crae hit the bridge support.

Crae peeled his cheek from the bed of ooze where it was cradled and looked around him blindly. His line was a limp curve over the edge of the bank. Heavy with despair, he lifted his hand and let it drop. The line tightened and tugged and went limp again. Crae scrambled to his feet. Was the Grunder gone? Or was it tired out, quiescent, waiting for him? He wound the line clumsily around his hand as he staggered to the creek and fell forward on the shelving bank.

BENEATH him, rising and falling on the beat of the water, lay the Grunder, its white fire dimming and brightening as it sank and shallowed, the wide blue head band as glittering, its mouth fringe

as crimson and alive as the first time he saw it. Crae leaned over the bank and put a finger to the silvery scales of the creature. It didn't move beyond its up and down surge.

"I have to stroke it," he thought. "Three times, three times the wrong way." He clamped his eyes tight against the sharply jagged gleam of every separate scale.

It'll rip hell outa your hand first stroke, but three it's gotta be.

"I could do it," he thought, "If it were still struggling. If I had to fight, I could do it. But in cold blood—!"

He lay in the mud, feeling the hot burning of the sick thing inside him, feeling the upsurge of anger, the sudden sting of his hand against Ellena's face, her soft throat under his thumbs again. An overwhelming wave of revulsion swept over him and he nearly gagged.

"Go ahead and rip hell out!" he thought, leaning down over the bank. "Rip out the hell that was in it when I hit her!"

With a full armed sweep of his hand, he stroked the Grunder. He ground his teeth together tight enough to hold his scream down to an agonized gurgle as the blinding, burning pain swept up his arm and hazed his whole body. He could feel the fire and agony lancing and cauterizing the purulence that

had been poisoning him so long. Twice again his hand retraced the torture—and all the accumulation of doubt and fear and uncertainty became one with the physical pain and shrieked out into the night.

When he lifted his hand for the third time, the Grunder leaped. High above him, flailing brilliance against the invisible sky, a dark stain marking it from tail to head, the Grunder lifted and lifted as though taking to the air. And then, straightening the bowed brightness of its body, it plunged straight down into the creek, churning the water to incandescence as it plunged, drenching Crae with sand-shot spray, raising a huge, impossible wave in the shallow creek. The wave poised and fell, flattening Crae, half senseless, into the mud, his crimson hand dangling over the bank, the slow, red drops falling into the quieting water, a big, empty cleanness aching inside him.

DAWN light was just beginning to dissolve the night when he staggered into camp, tripping over the water buckets as he neared the tent. He stood swaying as the tent flap was flung open hastily. Ellena, haggard, red-eyed and worn plunged out into the early-morning cold. She stood and looked at him standing awkwardly, his stiffening, lacerated hands held out, muddy water dripping from his

every angle. Then she cried out and ran to him, hands outstretched, love and compassion shining in her eyes.

"Crae! Honey! Where have you been? What happened to you?"

And Crae stained both her shoulders as his hands closed painfully over them as he half-whispered, "I caught him. I caught the Grunder — everything's all right—everything—"

She stroked his tired and swollen face, anxiety in her eyes. "Oh, Crae—I nearly went crazy with fear. I thought—" she shook her head and tears of gladness formed in her eyes. "—but you're safe. That's all that matters. Crae . . ."

He buried his face in the softness of her hair. He felt sure. For the first time he felt *really* sure. "Yes, dear?"

"Crae . . . about what I said . . . I'm sorry—I didn't mean it, oh, I couldn't live without you . . ."

Gladness swelled within him. He pushed her gently from him and looked into her tear-streaked face. "Ellena—let's go home . . ."

She nodded, smiling. "All right, Crae, we'll go home . . . But first we'll have a good breakfast."

He laughed, a healthy, hearty laugh. "We'll do even better than that! We'll stop by at the camp of our four visitors. They owe us both a good meal for the drinks!"

Her eyes glowed at his words. "Oh, Crae—you really mean it? You're not—"

He shook his head. "Never again, honey. Never."

THE porch of the Murmuring Pines Store and station was empty as Crae stopped the car there at noon. Crae turned to Elena with a grin. "Be back in a minute, honey, gotta see a man about a 'fish.'"

Crae left the car, walked up the steps and pushed open the screen door. A skinny, teen-age girl in faded levis put down her comic book and got off a high stool behind a counter. "Help you, mister?"

"I'm looking for Eli," he said.

The girl's face showed a puzzled frown. "Eli? Eli who, mister?"

Crae gestured toward the porch. "The old feller that was out on the porch about two weeks ago when I stopped by here. Old Eli, he called himself."

The girl shook her head. "There's nobody named Eli in these parts, mister. You must be mistaken." She hesitated. Then a mischievous grin wrinkled her face. "Of course, there *is* Old Eli down in the South Fork . . ."

Crae stared at her. "South Fork?"

The girl nodded. "Yep. Course,

he ain't a real person—though nobody's ever seen him to tell!"

"What are you talking about?" Crae asked puzzledly.

"A fish, mister. The granddaddy of them all, according to those that's hooked him once or twice. Everyone says it isn't possible for a fish that big to swim in shallow waters—some say it's just a snag that gets your hook, it—"

But Crae was no longer listening. He turned from the girl and started toward the door, a dazed expression on his face. Dimly he heard the girl finish: "—it has another name too, besides Old Eli. Somebody started calling it The Grunder—guess because one fisherman said the ground shook like thunder when he took the hook—even have a few poems about him. Care to hear them?"

Crae shook his head absently, not looking back. The screen door slammed shut behind him. For a moment his head roared with sound. The sound of the wind, the water smashing over rocks, the—

A broken heart must be your share—for the Grunder . . .

Then the sound faded, his head cleared, and the bright sun was beating warmly down on him. .

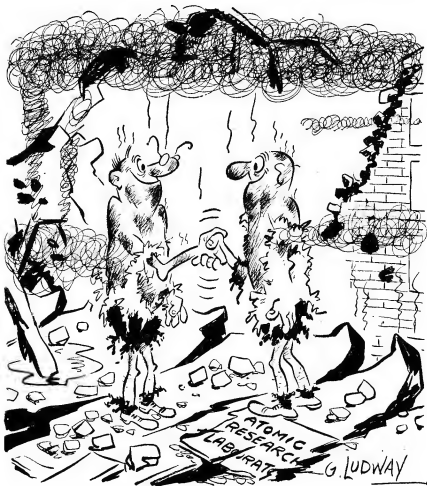
"Crae! Is everything all right?"

He looked to where Elena sat waiting in the car, calling to him.

He breathed deeply of the clean

air. Then he waved to her. "Everything's all right!" he laughed. He took the porch steps two at a time as he ran back to the car.

THE END





Seventy-eight people died as a meteor struck the space ship. Was it an accident? If not, the law provided for an unusual——

DEATH SENTENCE

By William Vine

WHILE waiting to be rescued, Logan spent most of his time in the main lounge. There were more than a dozen bodies floating there but two of them in particular kept his attention as he walked around in the magnetic booted spacesuit. He could not resist looking into their faces, swollen and distorted. They both showed the usual signs of asphyxiation, but the woman's, it seemed to him, had something else in it as well. Almost an awareness of just what had happened to them. The man was floating face down, but she was on her back, with her arms stretched up in supplication to the curved ceiling.

After the crash he had smashed the globe that set off the automatic radio distress signal, and now when he heard the dull clang of the anchor smacking against the outer hull, he went up to the entry lock. He watched the lock swing open

and the figures of the rescue party come through. He waved to them feebly. A few minutes later he was in the patrolship *Pollaket*, and they were helping him take off his spacesuit. He fainted, and they brought him brandy.

Captain Stewart, in charge of the *Pollaket*, was a slight, sandy haired man with thin features. When Logan had recovered sufficiently, he sat with Stewart in his cabin. The room was not very well appointed even for a second-class patrol-ship. Stewart sat upright in his chair before a plain but tidy desk. Logan had a battered sponge chair facing him. Stewart apologized for this.

"We don't often have visitors, and they never stay long. This must have been a very unpleasant business for you, Mr. Logan."

Logan nodded. "Yes, very."

"I don't want to make it any worse if I can help it, but there

are some questions I'm afraid I have to ask you. You know how it is — reports to make out."

"Yes, of course. I feel a little better now."

"We stock a good brandy," Stewart said. "Now first, Mr. Logan, were you travelling alone?"

Logan paused. "No. With my wife."

Stewart said: "I'm sorry. Would you mind telling me just what happened?"

"You know the usual safety regulations?" Logan said. "First thing out from Earth, all passengers have to go through the emergency drill, which includes putting on a space-suit. I wasn't able to do it with the rest; I have a migraine — it came on with the take-off and knocked me out for a couple of days. So I had to do mine on my own. I collected a suit and went to my cabin to put it on. You know, one feels a fool wearing one of those things in public."

STEWART nodded. His hands were pressed together in front of his chest, and he was rubbing them slowly.

"Suddenly, the lights went. That didn't worry me. I've travelled in space before, and I guessed what it was — a power blow-out. I knew they would have the stand-by generators on in a minute or two. All

the same, I felt shut in . . . in the dark, in my cabin. I felt my way out to the main corridor. I could hear people talking, laughing — one woman screaming somewhere but most of them seemed to understand what it was. Then there was a kind of whoosh, and the voices just stopped. Just turned off, from one second to the next. I went on into the lounge, where I had left my wife. There was full earthlight through the transpex windows, and I could see the people floating there. Everyone was dead.

"When I looked more closely, I saw that the transpex was smashed. I turned the alarm on straight away, and then I went hunting through the ship to see if anyone — one of the crew, maybe, was still alive. There wasn't anyone. I went back to the lounge. I found the meteor. It had dug its way into one of the sponge sofas. There were fragments of transpex scattered all around.

"After that, I guess I just sat and waited. It seemed a long time. A very long time."

"Yes," Stewart said. "I can imagine that. So, as you see it, it's fairly clear what happened? Something blew the main generators. That, of course, put the meteor defense out of action. And by sheer bad luck, in the minute or two be-

fore the stand-by generators went on, a meteor crashed through the transpex of the lounge windows. The air was sucked out into space in little more than a second. You were saved because you happened to have your spacesuit on at the time. Have I got it right?"

"Yes," Logan said, "that's what happened."

"You smashed the alarm globe as soon as you realized what had occurred?"

"Naturally."

Behind Stewart the usual battered notice on the wall stated that smoking was strictly prohibited from take-off until planet-fall. Stewart pulled open a drawer, and brought out a box of cigarettes. He offered them to Logan, who shook his head. "I don't smoke." Stewart lit one himself, and leaned back.

"What do you do, Mr. Logan?" he asked.

"My profession? I'm an engineer on one of the space stations. Equator 3."

"And this trip? Holiday?"

"Yes."

"On Mars? I thought you space station people never went anywhere but Earth for holidays."

"Generally true. But this time . . . My wife wanted a change."

"Had you been married long?"

Logan looked at him. "I sup-

pose you would describe yourself as hard-bitten, Captain Stewart. You haven't forgotten that my wife's body is still floating out there in the *Astarc*? I'm willing to help you as much as I can, but I would appreciate some consideration on your part."

"When we reach Earth," Stewart said, "you can put in an official complaint. Meanwhile I should like you to answer my questions. How long had you been married?"

Logan tightened his lips. "Five years."

"Leave from the space stations is one month in four. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Women get lonely being left on their own three months out of four. Sometimes some of them get to doing something about it. Was that what happened with Mrs. Logan?"

Logan said: "Commanders of patrolships have wide rights of interrogation in the course of their duties. But you're just being offensive, aren't you? I don't see why I should continue to put up with you." He eased himself out of the sponge chair and stood up. "If you'll excuse me."

STEWART blew smoke out through his teeth. "Stay where you are, Logan. I'm going to arrest you. Once I do, I can't ask you any more questions. And I want

to find just what kind of justification you had for what you've done. You will have a trial, of course, when we get back to Earth, but that's five days' journey on a boat like this. For five days you are in my charge. They leave me plenty of discretion as to how I treat prisoners. That's why I'm asking unnecessary questions."

Logan's voice was cold and even. "You're going to arrest me? On what charge?"

"On a number of charges. To be precise, on seventy-eight charges of murder."

"You're crazy."

"It was a good scheme, Logan—at least, the planning was good. It's easy enough, on a space station, to get hold of a meteor of the right size. That went in your luggage, along with some carefully shattered transpex. You dodged out on the space drill with that faked migraine, so that you would have an excuse for taking a spacesuit down to your cabin at the right time. You left your wife in the lounge and at the same time you planted an explosive by the transpex window. I don't know yet what you planted it in, but a number of things would do—the window ledges are always cluttered to hell on passenger boats.

"Then you went down to your cabin and got into your spacesuit. You waited there till the blow-up

came. Then you went along to the generator room and ditched the main generator, so that it would seem possible for a meteor to have got through the defense screens. You set off the automatic alarm, and after that you only had to scatter transpex about the lounge and plant your meteor in a sponge sofa. You must have done quite a lot of calculating for that alone. Trajectories and so on."

Logan said coldly: "Your job must be one that stimulates the imagination, Captain. And not in a very pleasant way, either."

Stewart said: "The trouble was, you took too much care, where your own skin was concerned. To be on the safe side, you climbed into your spacesuit well before the blow-up was due — maybe ten minutes before. Then, before you could send the alarm out that would bring rescue, you had to fix the main generators. That lost you more time. The alarm went out at 0507. We picked you up at 1059 — I had to note the time for the log. I noted something else, too. Each oxygen charge on a spacesuit lasts one hour precisely. If you had just put a suit on, by accident, at the time of the blow-up, you should have been near the end of your sixth charge. But you weren't — you were on to your seventh."

Logan smiled. "If that's all . . . It's true I deceived you about the length of time I'd had the suit on when the meteor hit. I'd had it on for maybe quarter of an hour. I'm an oxygen addict. I picked it up on the station. One doesn't like admitting things like that, even at a time like this."

Stewart looked at him. "You think fast, don't you? But a bit late this time. That only gave me the suspicion; I acted on it and got the proof. Before we lifted the *Astarte* out of her orbit, I had the boys check space outside the shattered window. A lot of the fragments would have been blown clear away, of course, but they found a few." He opened the drawer of his desk, and held up a broken piece of transpex. "Enough to show that what had happened was an explosion, and not an *implosion*. It's in the bag, Logan — right in the bag."

Logan looked at the piece of transpex. "She was a bitch," he said. "She wanted the holiday on Mars because he was going there. She couldn't be without him even for that time. I found he had arranged to travel with us on the *Astarte*. She didn't know I knew. It was my chance to get them both at the same time." His glance went to Stewart. He was smiling. "I got them."

Stewart pressed the button in front of him.

"I arrest you, Hamil Logan," he said, "for wilful murder. Seventy-eight people. Ten of them were children. Captain Rydusk was an old friend of mine. It's only five days to Earth, but I can tell you now you aren't going to enjoy them. I promise you that."

Logan shrugged. The door opened behind him, and a patrolman came in.

"Fourteen years I've been in this job," Stewart said. "And for the first time I'm sorry that we've given up executing criminals. All right, Benson. Take him."

THE jury had been human, but the judge was a robot. Immediately after the verdict, Logan had been taken back to his cell, and he sat there now, looking at the blank wall, listening to his sentence being pronounced in clipped mechanical words that issued from the small black box set in the middle of the ceiling.

The box said: "You have been found guilty, Hamil Logan, by an assembly of your peers, of wilful murder. A crime of this enormity has not been known amongst men for more than a hundred years. The harshest penalty that can be exacted must be too lenient. Out of jealousy you determined to de-

stroy your wife and her lover, and in pursuit of your end you did not scruple to kill seventy-six other human beings. You committed these additional murders simply in order to protect yourself from the consequences of the initial crime."

Whatever he said could make no difference to the voice implacably proceeding from above. The circuit was one-way only. His words would simply echo round the narrow cell.

"Capital punishment was abolished in the twentieth century, following the Atomic War and the barbarism that came after it. But there were still murderers, and they had to be committed for long periods to prisons, where they were a drain on the effort of the rest of the community. It was an unsatisfactory state of affairs, and men sought ways of remedying it. A way was finally found with the discovery of time travel."

The words dinned relentlessly at his ears. There was nothing new in it to him, but this part had been written into the robot a hundred and fifty years before, to be spoken automatically to every criminal who, since then, had been given the final sentence of temporal banishment. Nobody had bothered to have the record changed.

"The future cannot be traversed—only the past. And the journey

is in one direction only; backwards, because to return to the present from the past would entail travel into the future. For this reason, time travel can be of no value to men, except in one way only. It provides a means of ridding society of those who have shown themselves unfit to remain members."

Logan tensed. The preamble must be over soon, and then the verdict would come. He would know something of what he must expect.

"Obviously this is a form of punishment which is not unvarying. There are some periods of history which are less evil than others for a man to be exiled in. Some, as, for instance, the Roman Empire under the Antonines, are peaceful, and provide an opportunity for a man of the present to prosper, once he had adjusted himself to the environment. To those periods are sent the misfits whose criminality is of a minor or to some extent justifiable nature."

Not for me, he thought. But what?

"The period fits the crime. It is reasonable and just that this should be so."

The voice paused. He was on edge now. What was it going to be?

"Hamil Logan," the voice continued, switched now from the rou-

time tape to the direct attention of the robot judge. "Your crime, as has been stated, is of an enormity that has few parallels in our records. As far as we can contrive, your punishment will fit it. In your case there will be no prior notification of the destination — in time and space — that has been chosen for you."

Unable to contain himself, he cried out: "Why not? Why won't you tell me?" But there was no one to hear him.

"From this moment," the robot went on, "this age casts you out. You will see no humans of your own time again. In a few moments you will be put to sleep when the cell is flooded with hypnane. You will be given the usual hypnosis-inhibition against mentioning your origin to those who live in the past. You will not be able to tell them anything you may know of their future.

"You will be clothed as befits the time, and will be given such minor accessories as are thought to be necessary. If the circumstances require it, a knowledge of the language which you will have to use will be hypnotically implanted. Then you will be put in the time machine and transported. When you awake, you will be in the past. You will still have your present memories. When you realize in

what time and place you are you will know, from your knowledge of history, what you must expect."

Logan wanted to shout again, to protest that it was unfair that he should not know in advance, but the iron control that had enabled him to make and carry out his plans was in place again. He would know soon enough, anyway. He stared up at the small black box.

"Hamil Logan, the Twenty-Second Century casts you out. You will sleep now."

Still staring up, he heard the faint hissing sound as hypnane flooded in through the inlet valves of the cell. He caught the distinctive acrid smell, and then he fell asleep.

PEOPLE. They were all round him, thronging in a solid mass in which he, a single unit, was carried along with the rest. A tunnel. Stairs leading upwards. His nostrils twitched to the smell of hot and sweating humanity. He was wearing strange clothes, a rough cloth, and in place of his familiar contact lenses there were two lenses that rested on a frame fitting across his nose. He blinked his eyes, accustoming them to this strange vision.

The stairs debouched into a kind of hall that gave onto the open. A street, and unbelievably congest-

ed traffic. There was a stall on his left, selling what he recognized as magazines and newspapers. He pushed toward it, through the crowd. He felt in his pocket, and found coins. He handed one across the counter, and took one of the

papers. His fingers were trembling as he looked at it.

The paper was the *New York Herald Tribune*. The year was 1953.

People turned to look at him as he began to scream.

THE END

★ Miracles In Miniature ★

WITH all the impressiveness of the atomic bomb, with all the promise of the coming Lunar rocket, the gadget which will most change the course of the future is neither of these things. It is not big nor does it make a roar; in fact it is hardly bigger than a match-head, but in it lies the whole miraculous world of the future.

This thing is the *transistor*. By now the word is becoming moderately familiar. It is simply a miniature device which is able to replace the conventional electron tube. Those people who are in the know, the businessmen and engineers, realize that no single invention is likely to more modify our way of living than this little thing no bigger than a fingernail.

The transistor consists of merely a piece of an element called Germanium touched by two or three or four pieces of fine wire—that's all. But this simple, almost trivial arrangement of commonplace things, is able to do everything that the fa-

miliar glass bulbs in a radio or TV set can do. It will amplify, oscillate and rectify. It will do these things with but a fraction of the power required for a regular tube, and it will last longer, in some instances indefinitely.

With all these excellent qualities it takes no seer to know how the transistor will be applied—is being applied. Radio, TV, radar, computers—any conceivable electronic device, with the aid of the transistor can be squeezed down into a package astonishingly small. Wrist-watch radios, camera-sized TV transmitters, pocket-sized computers—these are part of today's science.

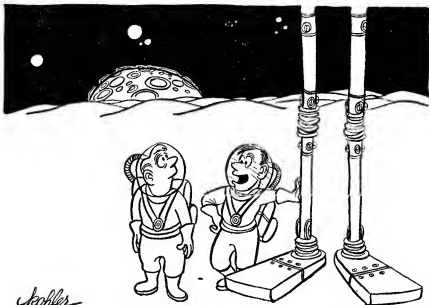
The ruggedness and compactness of the transistor along with all the electronic capabilities it possesses, will enable it to introduce electronic controls everywhere in industry, and in many places in the home. Controlling the routine work around a home, for example will not be difficult. A transistor-equipped electronic gadget along

with an electric motor is able to be put in a package as big as a fist. Closing windows, controlling every kind of appliance, the transistor age can make of the home a truly robotic servant. Until now the conception of a robot has been hindered in realization by the fact that the electronic controls necessary have been too bulky. With the transistor, all this changes.

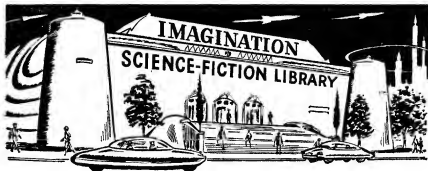
Unfortunately it is a bit difficult to glamorize a little sliver of germanium and a couple of wires, the essence of transistors, but the end results are impressive enough. The military effort at present is necessarily absorbing all the re-

search and output of the transistor producers, but when there is a breathing spell—and it's becoming apparent now — the ubiquitous transistor will appear in every imaginable type of thing, from the car you drive to the machines that feed and clothe you.

The latest communication on transistor development reports that this miraculous gadget can now be operated at VHF (very high frequencies), a fact which immediately broadens its scope to the entire electronic field. Don't watch atomics or the rockets—just keep your eye on the transistor—it's the thing that will change the world!



"Still, you'd think there'd be some form of life, wouldn't you?"



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted By Mark Reinsberg

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review selected books as a guide to your recommended reading list.

THIS ISLAND EARTH

by Raymond F. Jones, Shasta Publishers, \$3.00.

Set in present times, this original s-f novel draws a masterful comparison between World War II and Intergalactic War. In the same way that primitive peoples of the Pacific were involved in the global struggle as it swept across their strategic islands, simple-minded Earthmen are drawn into the battle between star civilizations because their planet is strategically located.

And just as the natives who helped build airstrips were unable to grasp the principle of that scientific weapon, the opposing galactic forces have achieved technologies that are beyond our powers of un-

derstanding: our keenest engineers, helping produce a mysterious ordinance item for the Llanna in their centuries-old defense against Guarra aggression, remain ignorant of its purpose.

Unfortunately, these engineers, are not very substantial characters themselves. But science-fiction, which handles four-dimensional concepts so effortlessly, always has had trouble supplying three-dimensional human beings.

On the other hand, the method by which the Llanna secret operators recruit "native" terrestrial help, described in the opening chapters, is new, ingenious and fascinating. The remainder of the book is moderately entertaining.

THE PETRIFIED PLANET.

by Fletcher Pratt, H. Beam Piper and Judith Merril. Introduction by Dr. John D. Clark. Twayne Publishers. \$2.95.

This is the kind of experiment every s-f reader will welcome. It is a jointly creative effort between a bona fide scientist (Dr. Clark was one of the discoverers of sulfa) and three established writers. The scientist writes a detailed description of the conditions to be found on "an imagined but possible world," and the writers, independent of one another, produce stories that "solve the problems of that environment in human terms."

"The Long View," by Mr. Pratt, offers a curious class struggle between Pure Scientists and Psychs over who should control the rest of humanity. "Uller Uprising," by Mr. Piper, shows the troubles of a planetary proconsul when the natives mix nuclear armament with na-

tionalism. "Daughters of Earth," by Miss Merril, presents the story of interstellar colonization from pioneering women's point of view.

Of the three interpretations, this reviewer chooses the third one as the most original and inspiring. While Mr. Pratt is a skillful entertainer, Miss Merril projects richer and more serious emotions. She's not afraid to throw herself into the scene. She has her idiosyncrasies of style, but these are refreshing to encounter, as if accentuating her pride in the six generations of heroines—daughters, wives, and mothers—through whom history flowed and the star-reaching destiny of mankind found its expression.

This book is a terrific idea. The publishers have hit upon a competitive device of great literary possibilities. Every s-f reader will want to judge the results.

THE TITAN

by P. Schuyler Miller. Fantasy Press. \$3.00

Seven short stories and a novelle, all originally published in magazine form, dating as far back as the early 1930's. Most of these are entertaining reading even today—which is meant as a definite compliment to Miller, since pitifully few of the s-f authors of that period knew how to write, irrespective of their marvelous concepts.

His style is rich and individual, wound about such themes as colonial life on Venus, paradoxes of time travel, and alien spores landing on

Earth. The title piece in the collection, "The Titan," presents a unique conception of Mars civilization, pointed up by a love affair between two Martians of hostile caste backgrounds — Blood Givers and Masters.

The former keep the latter healthy by means of compulsory blood transfusions. Once you get over the shock of this, you'll really enjoy this story. The Titan, incidentally, is an Earthman, the first to reach Mars in a rocketship, who's been captured and caged as a wild animal in the Martian zoo.



Conducted by Mari Wolf

MORE than one person has asked me lately, "Don't you think science fiction fandom is on the way out?" And when I ask them why, I get the same answer, "Because there's really no such thing as a fan any more. Everyone's interested in science fiction."

Of course there's more to being a science fiction fan than just being interested in the latest stf (?) television show, but — what do you think? Now that you're not a wild-eyed bem for even suggesting the possibility of spacecraft, now that you'll find reviews of stf books in the New York Times as well as in the fanzines, do you think fandom will (1) grow, to include everyone who occasionally reads an stf book, a la the mystery public, (2) remain more or less the same, with the same attitude toward rating favorite authors, magazines

and stories, or (3) vanish almost completely, save for a few . . .

"There were a thousand people at the Chicago Convention. They weren't all *fans*." Weren't they? To me, science fiction enthusiasm is contagious and healthy. It's always seemed a specious argument that bigness is fatal, that fandom must be small and exclusive in order to exist. You don't say that the Brooklyn Dodgers have no real fans because everyone in Flatbush loves 'em.

What do you think?

The other day the mother of a six year old boy asked me where she could get a book on space ships made easy—not for him but for herself, so she could answer his questions intelligently. It seems that he is designing a rocket ship but hasn't figured out what to do about gravity . . . And today I work in an aircraft factory, doing

routine assembly along with hundreds of other people, none of whom need to have the slightest knowledge of aerodynamics, or even of high school physics, for that matter. Fifty years ago, the name Kitty Hawk meant nothing, and a powered, heavier than air plane was merely a crazy dream in the heads of a couple of men named Wright . . .

Now airplanes are mass production items, (although there are still gaps in aerodynamical theory, and a bumblebee, according to the purely mathematical concepts of flight, cannot fly.) Spaceships are technically possible, even in the pages of conservative slick magazines, and a space station seems rather in the realm of immediate probability. Other stf concepts, though, are still impossible—many of them not extrapolated from known science at all. Time travel, for instance, or travel at speeds faster than light, or even anti-gravity . . .

But, five hundred years ago, if a young alchemist's assistant had tried dreaming about the future, what would have been the possibilities, and what the impossibles?

. . . You are an alchemist's assistant, and your master has one of two principal goals. Either he is working to find some herb that will indefinitely prolong life and youth, or he is working to transmute base metals into gold. He is even willing, perhaps, to sell his soul to the devil in exchange for either of these two secrets, but unfortunately the devil hasn't been around to collect.

You, perhaps, wonder what it will

be like in the future, say in the 1900's. But about the only way you have a chance to see that future is to have some rival alchemist, undoubtedly one whom the devil *has* contacted, cast you into a deep sleep that will last until . . . But no, that's foolish. You're not superstitious. There are really no black magicians . . . You go on mixing chemicals and muttering, about the philosopher's stone.

NOW suppose the rival alchemist and his horned friend do come, and you awaken in the year 1953. What will you find? What advances in science (in your definition of the term) will have been made? •

For one thing, there will be many more magicians, or scientists. You don't differentiate between the terms very well. Most of these magicians will be working on projects whose purposes to you are inconceivable.

They haven't found the secret of eternal youth, though they're working on it, but medicinally they've progressed so far beyond you that you're lost in a microscopic world of germ-devils and virus-devils and all sorts of material entitles to be killed and exorcised by the proper remedies. However, the magicians haven't won the final victory toward this goal. The fountain of youth is still out of reach.

You turn to the other goal of science—your science. The transmutation of base metals into gold. It's rather difficult, surprisingly, to find out anything about the success or failure of this dream. You certainly don't see much gold. Only

ornaments. And if you summon up courage to ask, you're likely to hear, "Who'd want to make gold? They'd just bury it at Fort Knox," and then on to some dissertation on economics that doesn't interest you at all, you being a truly dedicated alchemist's assistant.

And then, perhaps, comes your final disillusionment in this un-alchemistic twentieth century. You learn about cyclotrons, and the transmutation of elements . . . Uranium into lead. Now whatever uranium is, *who* would possibly want to make lead? But at least the cyclotron does turn one element into another. Now if it were only used for something useful . . .

Create gold in the cyclotron? They look at you and laugh. Of course it's possible. Costs more than natural gold, though. They laugh again, and say something about superstitious alchemists with their pentagrams and cabalistic signs and their dreams of a philosopher's stone—and then they dismiss you altogether and get back to the projects that are useful to them. The uranium breakdown cycle. Fission and fusion. Atomic bombs.

And there's no way you can steal a cyclotron and travel back through time to your own people and a sensible way of life, where you could use all the fruits of twentieth century science as they should be used.

To create gold.

. . . But of course you're not an alchemist's assistant, and neither am I. The frontiers of our science are far from those of the alchemist, and we at least are aware that they are fluctuating and ever expanding.

Science fiction? It's sometimes hard put to keep battering at those frontiers—lots of them are settled so quickly. However . . .

The *chemical* transmutation of elements was impossible. Transmutation wasn't. Anti-gravity? Time travel? Hyperspace and subspace and warped space and Alpha Centauri III in time for breakfast? Impossible, today. Perhaps always impossible.

And yet, if you or I awoke in the future some five hundred years from now and asked about the outcome of some of our dreams, some of the wild imaginings of today, I wonder what answers we would get.

Would we be like the heroes of so many science fiction stories—the dreamers seeing the fulfillment of our own personal and cultural dreams?

Or would those men of the future merely smile at our questions and say, "Why, of course . . ." and then go on about what was really important.

To them . . .

FROM Publicity Chairman Tom Clareson of the 11th World Science Fiction Convention comes this already timely reminder.

"Memberships for the 11th World Science Fiction Convention may now be obtained by sending a dollar to Box 2019, Philadelphia 3, Pa.

"The time of the convention is Labor Day weekend, September 5-7. The place, the Bellevue Stratford Hotel, one of the finest and best known on the east coast. We have engaged for the exclusive use of the convention activities the main ballroom, the 18th floor, the roof gar-

den, and the well known Clover Room. More important, from the point of view of you fans, perhaps, is the fact that the Bellevue will give a special, flat, room rate to all convention members: \$6 for singles, \$10 for doubles.

"... It's too early for a definite program schedule, but program chairman Lester Del Rey tells me we're going to match Chicago's brilliant first, the s-f ballet.

"So for one of the great fan experiences of your life, get that dollar in to Box 2019, Philadelphia 3; then you'll be a member of the 11th World Convention in Philadelphia in '53."

And Willy Ley's going to be the guest of honor, too . . .

Try to make it if you possibly can.

Now to the fanzines.

* * *

STF TRENDS: 25c; Lynn A. Hickman, 239 East Broad, Statesville, North Carolina. Two fanzines, TLMA and The Little Corpucle, have combined to form STF Trends. It's a happy combination, with really good cover art, stories and humor. There's one cartoon in the issue I have here which seems to me should have done well on the open, or paying, market. It's Lach's drawing of a little boy looking up admiringly at the bathing suit clad hero with the word *Lifesaver* emblazoned on his chest and asking, "What flavor are you?"

Dr. L. W. Carpenter's guest editorial, "Cliches and Comics," takes up the fight for setting and maintaining literary standards in science fiction. It's a very interesting article, especially where Dr. Carpen-

ter cites the rather prevalent reliance on cliché thinking instead of on logical argument—but have literary standards ever been high, or even maintained, in any field? Some of Shakespeare's contemporaries, for example . . .

A very interesting issue I think you'd like . . .

* * *

UTOPIAN: 25c; quarterly; R. J. Banks, Jr., 111 South 15th. St., Corsicana, Texas. Included in Utopian is a column on Texas Fanews—all about the organization of Texas Fandom. So if you live in Texas and are fannishly inclined but haven't been contacted by the club, why don't you write to Banks for the information?

This mimeographed fanzine is noted for good fan fiction—editor Banks proudly tells that he rejects more stories than he accepts. Also there's a regular column reviewing the professional science fiction magazine stories. I find this Pro-mag Parade the most interesting of all the fan review columns. (Not that I always agree with the ratings, but the points of view from which the stories are summarized are interesting—none of this "it stinks" or "it's terrific" type of criticism which tells you nothing.)

* * *

SCIENCE FANTASY BULLETIN: 15c; monthly; Harlan Ellison, 12701 Shaker Blvd., Apt. 616, Cleveland 20, Ohio. There's a little bit of everything in the Bulletin, and all of it done in a spirit of fannish exuberance.

There are reminiscences of the Chicago Convention (and well I remember Harlan and his ever pres-

ent but never lit pipe), such as Harlan J. Youngfan's "Goshwow-boyohboyohboy!!! or, A Brief Account of a Meeting with Walter A. Willis, Boy Fan." There are comments about an evening in a smoke-filled room (Harlan's) and the politicking for Philadelphia as the 1953 Convention site. And there's an article in an issue I don't have here, darn it—Robert Bloch's "What Every Young Spaceman Should Know", a written-down version of Bob's Convention Speech.

All in all, a lot of fanzine with a varied but breezy style.

* * *

STF TRADER: 10c or 4/25c; K. Martin Carlson; 1028 3rd Ave. So., Moorhead, Minn. Here's a handy aid to all you s-f collectors. The Trader tells you where you can buy, sell or swap your back issue magazines or books. If there's a copy of some magazine you want but don't know how to obtain, put an ad in—you can get a quarter page ad for 25c, and some fan will probably be willing to part with what you want.

Or if you have an attic full of s-f magazines you don't want to keep, advertise. The collectors will be glad to hear from you . . .

* * *

PEON: 10c; Charles Lee Riddle, 108 Dunham St., Norwich, Conn. In the issue I have here Ken Slater writes an article entitled, "Stop This Punishing Business!". He's campaigning, naturally, for the abolition of puns . . . He claims that Walt Willis started punning among science fictionists but I'd give odds that Forry Ackerman was being punny first . . . For puns though,

you should hear the two of them, not to mention Rog Phillips, all cooped up on a transcontinental automobile trip (if I only could remember those gems—the only one I recall, and that out of context, was a dog-infested town in Utah which Walt said had a high population).

Then there's Larry Saunders' article "It's Like This . . ." in which he knocks most fan poetry and quotes a bit that he almost likes. There'll probably be rebuttals on that one . . .

And there's Don Howard Donnell's story, "The Dreamless," of a man who, on the day after his marriage, kills his robot bride and commits suicide because she is incapable of dreaming . . . Proving, Mr. Slater, that all brides need *Imagination* . . .

* * *

SF: 15c; monthly; John L. Magnus, Jr., 9612 Second Ave., Silver Spring, Md. This is the fanzine put out by the members of the "Hopeful Young People's Extra-Radical Society for the Promotion of Amiable Conditions Everywhere . . . more conveniently known as Hyperspace."

Editor Magnus, in his article "Science Fiction Exit Fantasy," points out the difference between the two types of stories—the difference, that is, as he sees it. I've yet to find a group of fans anywhere who could really agree on where science fiction leaves off and fantasy begins, and on just which side of this hypothetical borderline you would place a particular story . . . John holds to what Gernsback said at the Chicago Convention, "When I talk about science fiction I mean

science fiction, not science fantasy or fantasy." That, of course, leaves you with the necessity of defining science.

The fiction in future issues of SF promises to be most interesting, for, as the editor states, "I can't say that the stories will be pro-genre, but they will be pro-thought." And amiably extra-radical too, I'll venture . . .

A highly enjoyable fanzine.

* * *

VOID: 25c; 320 East Williams St., Fort Wayne 5, Indiana. Co-editors C. A. Cook, and Lew A. Gaff (and I don't know which, if either of them, owns the above address) start out their new fanzine in a big way. There's sixty pages of Void, and in these pages you'll find three short stories and one ten thousand word installment of a serial!

The serial, Stuart Cory's "Hammer and Cycle," is a novel of the resistance movement in Occupied America, written in a hardboiled way even down to the tough and cynical hero. Actually I didn't care too much for the characters while I was reading the story, but now, darn it, I wish I had the rest of it . . . Unusual, and realistic.

And the editors' discussion of Bradbury is interesting too—Cook doesn't like him and Gaff, as far as I can make out, isn't quite sure . . .

* * *

VEGA: 10c or 3/25c; monthly; Joel Nydahl, 119 S. Front St., Marquette, Michigan. Here's a fanzine that started off fine and keeps getting better. Starting with the third issue it's mimeographed—and a well set-up, legible job of mim-

eography too.

The issue I have here features Charles Lear's story, "Asteroid," about two men waiting for death in a disabled spaceship, with the asteroid nearer and nearer . . .

Maybe it's coincidence, or maybe it's Joel's influence, but the majority of stories in Vega feature dialogue that really advances the action. Or maybe it's just that Vega runs the sort of fan fiction that I personally like . . .

But I bet you'd like it too.

* * *

BREVZINE: 10c; monthly; Warren A. Freiberg, 5018 West 18th St., Cicero 50, Ill. Here's a pocket-sized fanzine where you'll find a bit of everything—articles, stories, cartoons, and book reviews.

And the issue I have here has something special — an account on an interview with MADGE's editor, William L. Hamling, once known as the editor of the fanzine *Stardust* . . . There's a rather good likeness of Bill on the cover, too . . .

Also in this issue—a cartoon showing the poor sad robot author in the editorial office, and the caption, "Sorry, Sir, but Dr. Asimov does all our robot stories for us . . ."

* * *

SCIENCE FICTION NEWSLETTER: 20c; quarterly; Bob Tucker, P. O. Box 702, Bloomington, Ill. Bob Tucker's superlative news magazine keeps on—covers by Lee Hoffman, yet, as well as some of her swamp critter illustrations . . .

It's rather late to tell you about last year's Convention, but if you were there and don't have Tucker's Convention report issue for a sou-

venir, you're missing something. And if you weren't there—well, better luck *this* year, at Philadelphia.

One thing you got wrong, though, Bob. It wasn't a red station wagon that bore Walt Willis off to Los Angeles—it was a maroon DeSoto sedan. Ours. Hernando doesn't like those wooden cars . . .

* * *

SKY HOOK: 15c; quarterly: Redd Boggs, 2215 Benjamin St., N. E., Minneapolis 18, Minn. Sky Hook, combined with Chronoscope, is one of the many fanzines published for FAPA, the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. In this case there are also copies for general circulation—and if you're interested in serious discussion on various aspects of science fiction, you'll find it here.

I especially liked "The Okies—and Others" by James Blish, in which author Blish discussed his stories of the Okie Cities—and classes them as an evolutionary series. He makes the distinction between the two types of series stories—the template, in which all the stories of the series are written around an unchanging nucleus, and the evolutionary, in which the original story idea changes as the story proceeds. A critical magazine, in the best (and original) sense of the word.

* * *

PHANTASMAGORIA: Derek Pickles; 22 Marshfield Place, Bradford, Yorks, England. United States residents may enter a subscription by forwarding a copy of a professional science fiction magazine not published in a British edition—MADGE would be very welcome.

In the issue I have here, Kenneth Slater's "The Man in Green," deals with the Robin Hood legend and its possible bases in fact, folklore and mythology. It's a very well presented study of the various Robin Hood characterizations, their chronological appearance, and the way they tie together to form the complete legend.

You'll find here a tendency that's evident in many British fan publications—research into the background of fantasy, into legends and traditions and the continuity of folklore.

Not that Phantasmagoria is heavy reading. It's not at all. I'm sure you'd like it, and it's wonderfully British flavor.

* * *

FAN-VET: Ray Van Houton, 127 Spring St., Paterson 3, New Jersey. Here's the fanzine devoted to the interests of the fantasy fan in the United States Armed Forces. It's the newsletter of the Fantasy Veterans Association, a group which spends a lot of time and effort collecting magazines for overseas fans who might otherwise be unable to obtain them.

If you have any magazines to donate, they'd be so much appreciated, for as James V. Taurasi, Commander of the association, said shortly before the April Convention:

"Funds now in the Fan-Vet treasury can best be used in sending s-f reading material to service readers overseas, and for the other Fan-Vet services now being organized . . . The thanks of every service man who reads science fiction, as well as our own, is extended to all

the friends of this organization."

* * *

OOPSLA!: 15c; Gregg Calkins, 761 Oakley St., Salt Lake City 16, Utah. Hal Shapiro has an article in this issue. It's called "Stricture," and in it Hal says that fandom is too big, that it now consists of people who aren't fans at all, and that the good old days of amateur publishing, when most fans wanted to be professional science fiction writers, are gone forever . . .

That's what Hal thinks about the present state of fandom. As for the future: "Fandom will become a commercialized thing, subsidized by the stf publishers and used like the fan groups formed around movie stars." Or, "Fandom will become so large, involved, and unwieldy that it will disintegrate almost completely."

I can just see the teenage girls hopping the train for New York, clutching prozines in their hands

and whispering, "We're going to crash the pulps . . ."

* * *

SPACE REVIEW: 35c; P.O. Box 241, Bridgeport 2, Conn. This is the magazine all about flying saucers, and if you're interested in the phenomena you might like to send for a copy. It lists saucer sightings and theories by members of the International Flying Saucer Bureau as to where the saucers came from and what their intentions are . . . The magazine isn't a fanzine, obviously. But if you believe in the saucers, you might be interested.

* * *

Well, that's about all this time. Remember, if you have a fanzine you want reviewed, or club doings you want publicized, write to me, Mari Wolf, Fandora's Box, IMAGINATION, P.O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill. See you next month.

—Mari Wolf



"Metall"

Letters from the Readers

WE LOVE THOSE ROSES!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Just dropped in to say hello, and to compliment you on your fine magazine, IMAGINATION. I hesitated to write as my first thought was, "Who would publish such an ordinary letter?" Then, on second thought I considered, "Who wouldn't?"—This may be as good as the next one!

More compliments to you upon the patience you exercise in dealing with the numerous fans and readers who have their letters published in Madge. Now, stf readers are supposed to have mature minds—or so they say—but some fail to display such a characteristic in their rude complaints regarding their dislikes. As the old expression goes, "Roses to you!"

I would like to hear from fans and readers in or near Erie. It would be a real pleasure to exchange ideas, magazines, and so on. Thanks for listening.

Miss Fern Cobb
843 Priestly Ave.

Lawrence Park, Erie, Pa.
*The pleasure is all ours, Fern.
Let's hear from you again . . . with*

THUMBSCREWS YET!

Dear Ed:

The April issue of Madge was wonderful! And there aren't enough superlatives in the English language to express my enjoyment of THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE. You should put the thumbscrews on St. Reynard until he promises you another Godwin story!

The rest of the stories were well-written, and I enjoyed them. But they didn't hit me the way the novel did. I am, incidentally, looking forward to Dan Galouye's novel in the May issue. Matter of fact, I'm looking forward to the May issue, period! . . . Why don't you come out every week? Then I might have enough Madge reading material to keep me busy.

In regard to Cusack's letter in the April issue, I don't agree with him that Madge should de-empha-

size fandom. I have just recently joined the ranks of active fandom, and I think it is a wonderful institution. I have made some very nice friends via fandom, and I'm looking forward to making many more. So emphasize fandom all you can, and to Ghu with all these wet blankets who think stf is their own oyster shell.

Marilyn Shrewsbury

Box 1296

Aransas Pass, Texas

By a not so strange coincidence we have got Geoff St. Reynard working on a new story right now—not to forget his great forthcoming novel in the August issue, THE BUTTONED SKY. Don't miss it. . . . wth

SCHIZO-PALMER?

Dear Bill:

I'd like to put in my vote for one of the best pieces of fantasy ever published in a slick publication. I mean, of course, THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE by Geoff St. Reynard in the April Madge. I was sorry to see the last page come. That is very unusual because ordinarily I don't like fantasy. By the last few lines of the story I take it that St. Reynard is planning a sequel. Good! I'll

eagerly await it.

I like your format and covers, and all the departments. Your back cover feature helps Madge too—perhaps more than you think!

I have one little question to ask. Are you R.A.P.? Everything tends to look that way. You and Palmer left Ziff-Davis about the same time. You both are in the same city. You write the same way he does. And Madge and OW are almost identical. Admit it. **YOU ARE PALMER!**

Kent Corey

1118 W. Broadway

P. O. Box 64

Enid, Okla.

What you said! While we accept the compliment, we're certain Raymond will take a dim view of the idea, perhaps even to the extent of being a rank insult! Nope, Hamling and Palmer are two separate entities. Perhaps RAP has more than one — that we can't vouch for, what with his assurances to us that he has flown a "flying saucer", been in contact with Shaver's "cave" people (help!) and in general enjoyed visits and visitations to and from sundry astral spheres. We personally never dispute RAP's profound confidences, but to suggest that we enjoy the same Other Worldly travels is un-

11th World Science Fiction Convention

THE TIME: September 5-6-7, 1953 (Labor Day Weekend). **THE PLACE:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—Bellevue Stratford Hotel. **THE PROGRAM:** Banquet, costume ball and many other gala festivities for all fans. **GUEST OF HONOR:** Willy Ley, internationally famed science writer. **MEMBERSHIP:** \$1.00—send to 11th World STF Convention, Box 2019, Philadelphia 3, Pa. Members receive all Progress Reports—join NOW!

fair to RAP. After all, we're just a mere mortal, confined to journeying upon the highways and byways of the good old USA. Maybe some day we'll enjoy a membership in whatever mysterious "inner circles" Ray is privileged to belong to, but until that time all we can do is look up at him with awe. Nope, we're not Palmer. And we have positive proof — we play a much better game of gin rummy than he does with

CUSACK ON THE PAN . . .

Dear wlh:

All went fine in the April issue of Madge. I enjoyed THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE and the rest of the stories. Having finished the "meat" of the book, I settled down to happy contemplation of your usually pleasant reader column.

Unsuspecting soul that I am I cruised through until brought up with a jerk at another Cusack epistle. That is the reason for this letter.

Personally, after reading what Cusack had to say, several times, it was with considerable effort that I controlled myself. I pity him holding his arguments in a group of real fans. Happily, his views are shared by few other fen.

For goodness sake, don't shove fandom down his throat! (I have a piece of lead pipe that would do nicely!) . . . The chief reason for having a letter column is to supply readers with an outlet for their opinions. Via this medium the magazine learns how to improve—as the will of the majority dictates.

I do not believe I am far off when I say that 75% of Madge's readers are in favor of a fan department. Faced with overwhelming opposition, it is logical to assume that Mr. Cusack would acknowledge his defeat and leave the department to those who enjoy it. But no! He must continue his attempts to dispose of it entirely, thus ridding the majority of readers of an enjoyable department. My advice to him is that he tear out the pages containing the "asinine letters".

Bouquets to you, ed, for upholding fandom. We're behind you all the way.

My only regret is that the "suave, debonair" Mr. Cusack will not read this — he being allergic to letter columns.

Daryl Sharp
RCAF Station

Greenwood, N.S., Canada
We'll bet Pete reads your letter, Daryl. And we'll even bet this isn't the last you'll hear from him. Right, Pete? with

THE REASONS WHY . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I'm enclosing my subscription to Madge, and I'd like to let you know at the same time my opinions of the magazine, favorable ones.

Madge is second only to *Astounding* and *Galaxy* in science fiction stories; second to none in science-fantasy stories. Madge doesn't have extensive advertising like *Asf*. Madge has only one editorial—labeled as such. Madge has FAN-DORA'S BOX, the easiest road to fandom.

But, Madge has her faults too. Science briefs, which I can get in Science Digest where they belong; too much of two good things—Terry's and McCauley's covers. More variety of artists, please. Monthly publication, which she doesn't have as yet; and a lack of a personals column.

Thanks for listening to my opinions. Here's hoping Madge's circulation triples . . .

Norman N. Armitage
210 Avenue F
Redondo Beach, Cal.

You'll note, Norm, that Madge has introduced a number of new features recently — lots of cartoons, and a book review feature this month. And, hardly to be overlooked, this June issue is the first full monthly issue. That's a big point to remember — every four weeks from now on! As to cover artists, Madge has used Bok, Hinton, Terry, Smith, and McCauley. A wide variety of styles. And just wait until you see next month's cover — a new Smith photo job—the first science fiction cover to ever incorporate an actual photograph of interstellar space. You've got a real treat in store for you.
... with

REAL GEORGE, BY GOLLY!

Dear Ed:

This is the first letter we have ever written to a science fiction magazine (prozine). We thought that the April issue of Madge was the best you've had yet! THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE was real George—the best in the issue.

Dick Shaver's story, PARADISE PLANET was very good too. Can you tell us what the big Ruckus is all about concerning Shaver? We heard he wrote some unusual stories back in 1947 and '48. Maybe they had something to do with it.

The April cover by Terry was real George too. Let's have more like it. And please use Malcolm Smith more often. He really gets some pretty gals in his paintings.

Looks like we'll have to subscribe right quick—what with stories coming up by top writers like Galouye, Swain, Lesser, etc. And those back covers are really educational. By all means keep them coming.

Referring to page 161 of April—my, you're a handsome guy. We heard the radio program, *Space Adventures of Super Noodle* and thought it was terrific entertainment. It really deserved the award Madge gave it. Rhea sure looks pretty—just like an IMAGINATION cover!

Keep up the great work you're doing with Madge.

David Rike
Box 203
Rodeo, Cal.
&

Peter Graham
Box 149
Fairfax, Cal.

Your letter was real George too, fellas. So you want to subscribe? Turn to page 162—what are you waiting for? . . . As to the "Shaver Mystery" you'll find out all about it in back issues of Amazing Stories from 1944 through '48 . . .
... with

CONSTANT READER

Dear Ed:

With the usual preliminary, this is the first letter I have ever written to any magazine. I don't have any gripes about Madge. Matter of fact, I've been a constant reader ever since IMAGINATION started back in 1950. One of the big points of enjoyment I get out of Madge is the fact that your stories usually run to the so-called "thud and thunder" type as contrasted by the "science" type you find in GSF and ASF.

Your idea about having back cover pictures is a good one. I wish that some of your competitors would adopt the same fine policy.

Now for the stories in the April issue. PARADISE PLANET by Shaver was an intriguing story throughout. I especially liked that expression, "Vey fanis vu?"

THE LOST EGO by Rog Phillips was pretty good too, an interesting twist on the cybernetics plot. SECOND WIND by Dan Galouye wasn't up to his usual par, although it was a pretty good spy-type story. And it might very well be prophetic in its theme!

PREFERRED POSITION was interesting. THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE by St. Reynard was tops in my book. Besides being of the "thud and thunder" type, it was interesting, exciting, and full of suspense. The humor was good too. I think that Geoff St. Reynard might do well to continue the adventures of Godwin, Ramizail & Company. Judging from this story, a series could prove to be quite entertaining.

If there are any fan clubs in this area I'd like to have fans contact me.

A/3C J. H. Gordon, Jr.
AF 19449315
674th AC/W Sq.
Osceola, Wisc.

We've had many requests for Geoff to do a sequel to the Godwin story. We'll see what we can do . . . wh

THREE GOOD REASONS!

Dear Ed:

Having been a science fiction reader for less than a year, I have not bothered to write a letter before. But after reading the April issue of Madge, I just had to.

There are three reasons why your magazine is, in my opinion, one of the very top books in the field: St. Reynard—St. Reynard—and St. Reynard! You have in him science fiction's best writer since Ray Bradbury.

The first St. Reynard story I read was TOMORROW THE WORLD! in the September '52 issue. I could hardly keep my teeth from chattering! If that were dramatized on the air in the way Orson Welles now-famed "Martian" broadcast was, I think it would have far more dramatic effect. I thought this was tops, but then I read ARMAGEDDON, 1970! in the October issue. That was the most powerful novel I have yet read. What a writer!

THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE in the April issue was no disappointment. In fact, it was almost up to ARMAGEDDON, 1970! Simply terrific. Hollywood should definitely make a movie of that

story.

All I can say is, more of Geoff St. Reynard! And while I'm on the subject of more — get more TOFFEE stories by Myers, and keep Dan Galouye busy.

Peter Kreeft
26 Richardson Ave.
Paterson 2, N. J.

*St. Reynard will be kept busy—
as will Charlie Myers (he's got a
new story coming up right soon)
and Dan Galouye. In Madge our
motto is, nothing but the best! ...
... with*

WORD FROM JAPAN

Dear Sir:

This is my second time to write to a SF editor in America. I am a beginner in the field, but I like to read the science fiction very much. And unfortunately we Japanese have not any SF magazines that are published in Japan.

After my first letter appeared in an American magazine I got many letters and several gift SF magazines. So I found your IMAGINATION. I am 29 years old, married, and have one baby girl. My profession is photographer and I also work as an interpreter—not very good one! I have the wild ambition to be SF writer and am reading all I can find.

In your July 1952 issue I read a letter by Mr. Peter Cusack. I agree with his opinion all except one point. He said the letter section is not necessary in the SF mags. I think this is big fault. I like very much to read the letter section. His failure is this—the American good SF mags are not

only for Americans; they are world-over magazines. We foreigners who are not English-spoken people glad to know what common American and American SF fan thinking, and what is real nature of ordinary American. So the letter section is very important part of magazine. I wished to write him directly, but unless I am replying to his letter, in Japanese customs this is impolite.

I live in Kobe and can find few second-hand SF magazines. Of course, I can subscribe to American SF mags, but the cost is high against my thirty dollars a month. Maybe someday I be a subscriber to your SF magazine—fine mag.

I am sorry to trouble you with this absurd and not good English. But I really think SF can be the bond to combine the friendship between two nations.

To decide what fiction is good, I am not yet reached such stage. I am still beginner in SF, but I like it very much.

IMAGINATION is a good magazine. I wish someday that we Japanese have our own SF mags too!

Good luck to your good IMAGINATION.

Mr. Tetsu Yano

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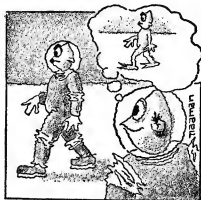
Verona, Penn.

Tahei Building
Uozaki, Uozakicho,
Higashinadaku,
Kobe, Japan

Receiving a letter such as yours is always a deep pleasure. And your reasons for favoring a letter section are ones which we Americans give too little thought to. Perhaps Mr. Cusack will revise his opinion of reader sections after reading what you have to say. Certainly a deeper understanding can be obtained between people of all nations by the frank opinions as expressed in letter columns. Rest assured that Madge will always have a reader section — and we'll welcome hearing from you again . . . Knowing how hard it is to secure science fiction magazines in Japan, we're including your name on our subscription list. We hope you'll enjoy all the future issues of IMAGINATION . . . wkh

EPISTOLARY FATUITY — HE SAYS!

Dear Mr. Hamling:



After having read some of the blathering drivel that seems to be the only thing you print in Madge's letter column, I have decided that it's about time that someone (namely myself) told you what he really thinks about your magazine.

All that you seem to print in the letter section are epics of epistolary fatuity that have only good to say about Madge. Are you afraid to print adverse comment?

Personally, I think that Madge is a rather "middle of the road" magazine with some good stories, (DEEPFREEZE in the January issue was one) a few stinkers, and the rest running in what I call the "higher mediocrity" bracket.

I must, however, congratulate you on your keeping FANDORA'S BOX. Ever since Howard Browne dropped the CLUB HOUSE at *Amazing Stories*, and Jerry Bixby quit *Startling Stories*, Madge has been the only magazine where reviews of the fan mags can be read. Again, congratulations.

As for the April issue, I find nothing particularly outstanding outside of the fact that St. Reynard left himself a beautiful opening for a sequel to THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE—but preferably not for a long while to come.

Sheldon J. Deretchin
1234 Utica Ave.
Brooklyn 3, N.Y.

As we've stated many times in the past, we don't shy away from critical letters—withness yours. The simple fact is that Madge doesn't receive many! To get back to your letter, you don't seem to be as displeased with Madge as you try to sound. Speaking of features,

we'd like to know if you—and the rest of the readers—are in favor of our new book review column. Drop us a line, gang . . . with

PAGING BERKELEY FANS

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I would like to compliment you on the wonderful magazine you edit. I enjoy most of the stories and features, but not the short articles at ends of stories. Fill up that space with more letters!

As I enjoy Madge so much I only hope you won't start using serials. I also hope that in the

future you'll print more stories by Kris Neville.

Will any teenagers interested write me? Also, I'd like to start a teenage fan club here in Berkeley.

Hoping you keep up the fine work.

Arlene Brennan
1284 Monterey Ave.
Berkeley, Cal.

Kris Neville is working on a new cover novel right now, Arlene. We're as anxious as you to read it! (It's being written around a terrific new Terry cover. Come on, Kris, hurry up!) . . . with

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TOMORROW'S SCIENCE

GREAT NEBULA OF NU SCORPI: Since many thousands of light years separate star-nebula (such as above) from Earth, interstellar travel may depend on short-cutting through theoretical hyperspace — as proposed in **STAR LORD**, page 6.